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**Urban Narratives in Hungarian Literature:
The Prose Fiction of Budapest,
1873-1939**

Gwenyth Jones

University College London,
School of Slavonic and East European Studies

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
September 2005

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2005

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines ways in which Hungarian writers depicted their capital city, Budapest, in the years between the creation of Budapest in 1873 and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, and discusses ways in which these literary representations of the city contributed to wider constructions of identity and difference. During this period, at the same time as Hungarian society became increasingly dominated by its rapidly expanding capital city, it also became more receptive to anti-urban sentiments. The late nineteenth-century explosion in population and publishing created a substantial body of new writing. Budapest came to represent everything that was new, and formed the context for broader discussions of morality, belonging, assimilation, race, and the nature and purpose of art. A thematic approach traces the development of urban narratives and tropes over time, and in each chapter, I discuss a number of works in social and literary-historical context. My argument is that Hungarian authors, despite their best efforts, failed to write the city in convincingly simplistic terms: the greater the urge to impose a form of logic or an ideology on the city, the less successful its realisation.

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I also wish to thank my examiners, Professor Donald Rayfield and Dr Robin Baker, for their attentive reading of this thesis, and their perceptive and constructive comments.

Statement

This thesis is all my own work. Quotations from secondary literature are indicated by reference to the author concerned. Literature used in this dissertation is indicated in the bibliography.

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Introduction

In the six years between the *Ausgleich* and the unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda, the mood of optimism in the Hungarian Parliament dictated that Hungary required, indeed deserved, a capital city that would symbolise the ideals of Hungarian liberals, exert an 'irresistible' material and intellectual attraction over all parts of the country in order to further national development, and function as a 'pleasant' rallying point for orderliness, culturedness, and elevated social principles.¹ In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Budapest was already home to pioneers of economic and intellectual modernisation and it quickly became synonymous with modernity itself, often expressed by one word: *pesti*.² This was the era of assimilation, hungarianisation, and rapid urbanisation. The 'period between 1867 and 1914 was without doubt the golden age of Hungarian Jewry, and some claim, of Hungarian culture generally'.³ Yet when Admiral Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) arrived in the capital on 16 November 1919, he announced in his address to the Mayor of Budapest that he and his victorious counter-revolutionary troops would punish this sinful city (*bűnös város*). From horseback, he thundered that Budapest had disowned her thousand years of tradition, dressed herself in red rags, imprisoned the nation's finest sons, and turned her back on the native soil.⁴ In 1936, the pre-eminent geographer

¹ 'A magyar államnak oly központra van szüksége, mely a magyar állam érdekeinek valóságos gyűlhelye, ezeknek legfőbb támasza és előmozdítója legyen, mely a magyar államiság eszméjét méltóan képviselje és a nemzeti fejlődés érdekében úgy szellemileg, mint anyagilag a részekre ellenállhatatlan vonzóerőt gyakoroljon. E központ egy hatalmas, alkatrészeiben egységesen szervezett főváros; mely a nemzet szellemi és anyagi fejlődésének leghathatósabb eszközeit folytonosan gyűjtögetve, helyhatósági intézményeinek lehető legcélszerűbb berendezése és kezelése által egyúttal a jó rend, a valódi műveltség és a társadalmi magasabb elvek kellemes gyűlhelyévé válják'. The Minister for Unification Law cited in Andor Csizmadia, *A magyar közigazgatás fejlődése a XVIII. századtól a tanácsrendszer létrejöttéig*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1976, p. 137. I shall refer to the Forradalmi Kormányzótanács (Revolutionary Governing Council, that is, the Hungarian Soviet Republic that lasted from 21 March to 1 August 1919) under Béla Kun as the Commune throughout (from the Hungarian *kommün*). All translations are mine; original Hungarian will be kept in the footnotes throughout.

² Meaning 'from' or 'of Pest'. Pest is often shorthand for Budapest, but because Pest was the centre of government, commerce and the arts, it could also denote all that was modern and innovative. 'Így lett a főváros mindenki számára szinte magától értetődő módon idővel a polgári világ és a modernség szinonimájává, melyet a "pesti" jelző fejezett ki röviden'. Gábor Gyáni, 'Előszó' in Gábor Gyáni (ed.), *Az egyesített főváros: Pest, Buda, Óbuda*, Budapest, Városháza, 1988, pp. 5-6 (p. 5).

³ Susan Rubin Suleiman and Éva Forgács, 'Introduction: Between Assimilation and Catastrophe: A Century of Jewish Writing in Hungary' in Susan Rubin Suleiman and Éva Forgács (eds), *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Hungary: An Anthology*, Lincoln NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2002, pp. xi-lxxii (p. xiv).

⁴ See 'Horthy Miklós fővezér válasza Bódy Tivadar polgármesternek a nemzeti hadsereg bevonulása alkalmával a Gellért szálló előtt mondott üdvözlő beszédére' in Ágnes Ságghvári (ed.), *Források Budapest multjából. III. Források Budapest történetéhez 1919-1945*, Budapest, Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1972, p. 21.

Gyula Prinz stated as fact in his four-volume historical geography of Hungary, that Budapest was completely separate from the landscape, people and state of Hungary.⁵ Much later, writing his memoirs, the poet István Vas (1910-91) recalled returning to Budapest after the Second World War, which he had spent in hiding in the countryside. When he saw that his home town was in ruins, he felt ‘fury, blind fury, and not against the Russians, who shot it to pieces, nor against the Germans, who sacrificed it, but against my compatriots, who had let it be sacrificed [...] They had nothing but contempt for their capital city [...] Who loved Budapest? The Jews did’.⁶

Subject of thesis

The subject of this thesis is representations of Budapest in Hungarian narrative prose fiction after the creation of the capital city in 1873, until the outbreak of the Second World War. Over this period of sixty-six years, at the same time as Hungarian society became increasingly dominated by its rapidly expanding capital city,⁷ it also became more receptive to anti-Budapest sentiments and polemics. I shall discuss Hungarian prose writers’ constructions of what the city was, and what it might or should be, during an era of revolutionary changes in art, politics and society, and within a literary culture pre-occupied with the city’s worldly excess and spiritual shortcomings.

⁵ ‘A XIX. század végén a magyar tájban is kialakult az „európai“ nagyváros első képviselője és ezzel Magyarország is megindult a polgárosodás fejlődésének útján abba az irányba, hogy a kisvárosok és mezővárosok sűrű rájába néhány nagyvárosi elemet ültessen és egy igazi nagyvárost ki is építsen. A nagyváros egészen más földrajzi szempontból és a táj tárgyi kitöltésének módja és képe szerint is, mint a régi, a történelmi, s a védelem miatt fallal körülvett régebbi város. A nagyváros olyan településföldrajzi jelenség, amelyben nagy néptömeg meghatározatlan szűk térben, jogi és társadalmi szempontból is külön szervezetnek tekinthető. Budapest nemcsak méreténél fogva sajátosságosan súlyos, külön test az országban, hanem önmagában is a népességnek különös, összeolvadt (korrelációját) teremti meg. Ezért a nagyváros úgyszólván független, külön települési szervezet, a tájban, a népben és az államban is’. Gyula Prinz, ‘A nagyváros szerepe a tájban és az államban’, vol. 3 of *Magyar föld. Magyar faj*, 4 vols., Budapest, Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, n.d. [1936], pp. 7-8. (p. 7). Prinz continues, stating that Budapest was distinct in terms of its size, material existence, organisation and *néplélek* (*Volksgeist*), to the extent that it resembled a volcano in the middle of the country. Furthermore, this was proof of the Hungarian anomaly, because other European cities (Prinz lists Rome, Lübeck and Venice, Greek city-states [*sic*]) enjoy harmonious relations with the provinces. The Hungarian state, however, demanded a ‘Hungarian Paris’ for itself, and in turn, the city imposed its will on the state.

⁶ ‘És hirtelen előtört a [...] düh, a vakdüh, és nem az oroszok ellen, akik szétlőtték, és nem a németek ellen, akik fölládozták, hanem honfitársaim ellen, akik hagyták fölládozni [...]. Megvetették a fővárosukat [...]. Ki szerette Pestet? A zsidók’. István Vas, *Azután*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1990, vol. 2, p. 419.

⁷ The combined populations of Pest, Buda and Óbuda had doubled in two decades from 134,000 in 1830 to 270,000 in 1851, and would rise to 930,000 by 1914.

My aim is to examine the complexities and paradoxes of selected works of fiction, and to re-assess the notion that Budapest elicited only negative or, less often, affirmative feelings from authors. I propose to do this by discussing texts set in Budapest by writers whose approaches to the city span the range of popularly-accepted positions, from ‘big-city writers’, to proclaimed urbophobes. I argue that they did not either simply despise or, less often, embrace the city, and suggest that they did both, and even more so when they were trying to shoehorn the multitude of experiences and perceptions of the city into a one-dimensional characterisation. I shall suggest that the term ‘anti-urbanism’ is a misnomer in the Hungarian context, by providing close readings of selected texts written from around the turn of the century onwards, as writers began to chronicle the discrete relationship between the transformation of the city and the transformation of the (writer’s) self, and engage with the burdensome image of the city as non- or anti-Hungarian. To deny that there is a rift in Hungarian society and thought between perceptions of the rural and the urban would be misleading. It is my contention that critiques of the modern city were not anti-urban by nature, nor were they proclamations of rural idyll: ‘there is nothing rural about them. They constitute a perspective critical of industrial society, to be sure, but an *urban* voice nonetheless’.⁸ Furthermore, the suspicion of the city and its association with an alien modernity expressed in Hungarian literature paradoxically serves to reinforce the power of the city in literary consciousness.

I am interested primarily in the contradictions and conceptual paradoxes that accompanied (and are still frequently employed to explain) Budapest’s uneasy transformation from being the largest Hungarian city in the Habsburg empire, to the sole great city in Hungary, the one and only *bűnös város*. More specifically, these were the tensions between the following: the presumed Hungarian (national) and Budapest (cosmopolitan) spirit, onto which the clash between tradition and modernity was frequently mapped; the image of the city as either ‘Judapest’, the city’s epithet accredited to Karl Lueger (1844-1910), Mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910, or as ‘Korrobóri’,⁹ Endre Ady’s (1877-1919) term, the symbol of mutually

⁸ Hillel J. Kieval, ‘Antisemitism and the City: A Beginner’s Guide’ in Ezra Mendelsohn (ed.), *People of the City: Jews and the Urban Challenge*, Studies in Contemporary Jewry, vol. XV, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 3-18 (p. 17).

⁹ ‘Hogy a zsidók megcsinálták nekünk Budapestet, s mindazt, ami talán – talán? biztosan – nincs is, de európaias és távolról mutatós? Segítségünkre jöttek nekünk, akik már nem vagyunk, azok, akik

beneficial social and cultural fusion between Jews and non-Jews, a city created by Jews for Hungarians (at least according to Ady); the intersections of public and private spheres in the representation of the individual versus mass society in modern art; the genteel, 'historical' middle class and the new, predominantly Jewish urban middle class, and the remarkably similar pretensions of both; men and women, that is, gendered morality, respectability and social roles; the physicality of the city, divisions within it and their impact on the individual psyche; and preservation of the status quo and change, with particular reference to the revolutions of 1918/19 and their aftermath.

My focus is necessarily selective. The time frame of this thesis spans two-thirds of a century, beginning with the project to rival Vienna and rally the peoples of Greater Hungary around the ideals of Hungarian liberals, through rapid urbanisation¹⁰ and urban growth, the 'happy days of peace', war, revolutions, territorial losses, the Horthy era and the rise of the Populists and the radical Right, until finally more war. The texts I have chosen may be discussed chronologically. However, I have taken a thematic approach, with a view to highlighting the tensions outlined in the previous paragraph, in specific contexts. The texts are, almost without exception, didactic, Realist works; portraits of their time. For the purposes of examining the development of city tropes, and the antinomies expressed by and within urban writing, I propose that a focus on narrative prose fiction is most fruitful. Contrasting images of the big city were, of course, also present in verse and drama of the era. I am, however, excluding analysis of poetic and theatrical works from this thesis. To discuss the representations of Budapest in more than one genre over almost seventy years would be too unwieldy a task, particularly when comparing texts written with quite specific and different purposes in mind. There is an overlap

mint nép, szintén nincsenek... gyűlölve-vágyva ropjuk a szerelmi táncot. Itt egymást fojtogatva a szerelemtől vagy új népet produkálunk, vagy pedig utánunk az özönvíz...' Endre Ady, 'Korrobóri', reprinted in László Karsai (ed.), *Befogadók. Írások az antiszemitizmus ellen, 1882-1993*, Budapest, Aura, 1993, cited in Miklós Lackó, 'Zsidók a budapesti irodalomban 1890-1930', *Budapesti Negyed*, 8, 1995, 2, found on 2 May 2005 at <http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/08/laczko.html>. A corroborree is an Aboriginal ceremonial meeting.

¹⁰ Urbanisation refers to 'the proportion of the total population concentrated in urban settlements, or a rise in this proportion [...] Cities can grow without any urbanisation, provided that the rural population grows at an equal rate or greater rate'. See Kingsley Davis, 'The Urbanization of Human Populations', *Scientific American*, 1965, cited in Deborah Stevenson, *Cities and Urban Cultures*, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2003, pp. 13-4.

in Hungarian between my focus on the form of narration and prose: the *elbeszélés*.¹¹ The texts I discuss deal with the impact of a heightened awareness of time (and of time ‘speeding up’) on the individual’s psyche in the city, as well as the individual’s experiments in conformity to social trends. Their authors, including the ‘big-city writers’ (*nagyvárosi írók*),¹² were mostly prose writers first and foremost. The writer who wished to paint a picture of urban society and the lives of its inhabitants told the story using *elbeszélés*, narration. The protagonists’ life stories told in these prose works were intended to condense and illustrate the broader social context, and moral lessons, they are aimed at evoking empathy and outrage or in the individual reader, they were written to portray and share insight, and not least to entertain. It was assumed by their authors, as I also assume now, that the readers of these works would have held similar beliefs, aspirations and social standing to the authors.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no historical novels of Budapest from this era. Indeed, the very idea seems to be a contradiction in terms. Not only because ‘memoirs are not fashionable in Pest’,¹³ as Gyula Krúdy (1878-1933) put it, but because the fiction written by and about those groups most intimately implicated in the rapid growth of Budapest, those who appreciated the changes so acutely because they were themselves constituent elements, catalysts and symptoms, of this urban transformation, could not have been less interested in a return to the past. Writers from the minor gentry may have bemoaned their own dwindling fortunes and the speed of social change, but in the texts discussed here, turn their attention to the hybrid forms of culture they found themselves surrounded by, and begin to apportion blame on themselves for the rise of the parvenus. Others, born into the Budapest middle class, or first-generation intellectuals from the provinces, also focus on the illusive nature of appearances in the city, and their own mimicry of older élites. It seems that the heat was on those members of the professional, civil servant and mercantile strata to find forms of genuine community and meaning in the confusion

¹¹ *Elbeszélés* can mean: narration, telling, relating; story, tale, narrative; or a short story.

¹² Usually, Sándor Bródy (1863-1924), Tamás Kóbor (1867-1942), Dezső Szomory (1869-1944), Jenő Heltai (1871-1957), Gyula Krúdy (1878-1933), Ferenc Molnár (1878-1952), Ernő Szép (1884-1953), Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936), and Frigyes Karinthy (1887-1938). Of these, only Szép was first and foremost a poet. Kosztolányi and Karinthy may also be considered poets as much as novelists.

¹³ ‘Pesten nem divat az emlékkönyv’. Gyula Krúdy, *Őszi utazások a vörös postakocsin*, Budapest, Singer & Wolfner, 1917, cited in István Sötér (ed.), *A magyar irodalom története*, vol. 5, p. 384.

of roles and assimilation of diverse groups into the expanding city. For their purposes then, as well as mine, fiction best served these ends.

I have restricted my focus to Budapest because the Hungarian capital did, and yet also did not epitomise the dichotomies of urbanisation in Hungary. At one level, what was happening elsewhere in other towns and cities in Greater Hungary was realised in the capital more starkly, and on a larger scale.¹⁴ Any self-respecting modern nation needs symbols of its national modernity, and as the only city in Hungary that ranked among other European cities in terms of size and population, the seat of national government, and centre of transport, trade and communications networks, Budapest alone fulfilled this symbolic jewel-in-the-national-crown role. It was, and remains, Hungary's primate city.¹⁵ The unprecedented speed at which the Hungarian capital grew would have been unsettling anywhere else in Europe.¹⁶ The fact that Budapest hogged most of the material benefits of modernity created a defensive intellectual response to the perceived parvenu, alien character of the city. This was not a centrifugal force creating a centripetal reaction, but rather a collection of expressions to make sense of, reform and, later, cleanse the city. In a number of

¹⁴ Namely, Győr, Szeged, Debrecen, and cities now outside Hungary in which Hungarian populations formed a substantial minority: Pozsony (Bratislava), Kassa (Košice), Temesvár (Timisoara), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szabadka (Subotica) and Újvidék (Novi Sad). Of these, only Temesvár was more ethnically diverse than Budapest, but was never regarded as the antithesis of Hungarianness. 'Apart from the capital, only Szeged hit the 100,000 mark [...]. A great many of the regional administrative and transportation centres, which also started to become industrialised (Győr, Kassa, Nagyvárad, Temesvár, Kolozsvár, Szeged or Fiume), as well as some of the market towns (the one-time *oppida*, such as Debrecen, Kecskemét, Kiskunfélegyháza or Szabadka) displayed features associated with urbanisation'. László Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary*, Budapest, Atlantis, 1999, p. 311. He lists these 'features' as follows: 'factory chimneys around the city and tenement blocks within it; paved streets, new public buildings (town halls, courts of justice, banks, post offices, institutions of secondary or higher education) in an eclectic or secessionist style; broad main street with fancy shops and, exceptionally, a tram line between centre and railway station; development of public utilities and electrification; flourishing local journalism, permanent theatre companies'.

¹⁵ This term refers to geographers' attempts to explain the phenomenon of one city dominating all others within a given territory. 'Such centres act as focal points of national settlement systems, performing certain specialized domestic functions most efficiently concentrated at one location. However, in doing so, they participate more fully than smaller places in an international system of commodity and information flows within which they can achieve a further specialization of function. In this way, they become part of a worldwide urban network which is partially independent of the national networks. This is the sense of the German coinage, *Weltstadt* (world city) [...]. This amalgam of functions allows each city to exercise a considerable influence over its vicinity, stretching from its immediate hinterland to the country in which it is located, and sometimes over adjoining national territories'. Peter Hall, 'Metropolis 1890-1940: Challenges and Responses' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis 1890-1940*, London, Mansell, 1984, pp. 19-66 (p. 3).

¹⁶ Reinhard Rürup considers the same fears in "Parvenu Polis" and "Human Workshop": Reflections on the History of the City of Berlin', *German History*, 6, 1988.

works I discuss, the city itself becomes the site of the spiritual revolution required to restore order and feelings of belonging. This is not, then, anti-urbanism, a dislike of all urban settlements, but the desire to synthesise *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in the national capital.¹⁷ Concentrating solely on Budapest means that the literatures of other towns in Hungary will be neglected. I shall not, however equate Budapest with the urban, as a sort of *primus inter pares* of cities. Although the focus of this thesis unfortunately reinforces the Budapest-centric bias of historiography and literary criticism, I wish to restrict my study in order to undermine precisely that stale cliché that writers could only hate or love the capital city. A comparative study of, say, Budapest and the most ethnically diverse city of Greater Hungary, Temesvár (today Timisoara), or perhaps Szabakda (Subotica), or a comparative overview of urban literature throughout central Europe during this period, remain to be undertaken.

The texts I discuss are works of fiction, rhetoric or autobiography set in Budapest, and the spatial, temporal and thematic structure of which is provided and informed by the city, or, more precisely, the writer's relationship with the city. Many of the works discussed here were set, and indeed could only have been set in Budapest as opposed to, say, Szeged, Debrecen or Győr. Until fairly recently, it was widely accepted in Hungarian literary criticism that the minor genre of urban (*nagyvárosi*) literature blossomed at the turn of the century, and that the 'big-city writers'¹⁸ who portrayed the experiences of urban modernity harboured at most an ambiguous affection for the metropolis that could liberate, but also destroy the individual: the 'very plastic qualities which [made] the city the great liberator of human identity also [caused] it to be especially vulnerable to psychosis and totalitarian nightmare'.¹⁹ It is true that Hungary never produced a cult of the city, a Baudelaire, a Futurist manifesto, a Joyce or Pynchon. Yet in many works depicting life in the remote village or small town, Budapest is never far away. Its pull is felt by the Chekhovian young girls in Margit Kaffka's (1880-1918) novels, dreaming of the

¹⁷ Ferdinand Tönnies's ideas typified central European notions of 'old', rural community and modern urban society. For Tönnies, 'the modern metropolis was the very epitome of the negative, empty contractual and abstract social relations that pertained in modern society, in part, by an arbitrary will devoid of any communalistic tendencies'. David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p. 5.

¹⁸ Usually implying Sándor Bródy (1863-1924), Tamás Kóbor (1867-1942), Dezső Szomory (1869-1944), Jenő Heltai (1871-1957), Gyula Krúdy (1878-1933), Ferenc Molnár (1878-1952), Ernő Szép (1884-1953), Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936) and Frigyes Karinthy (1887-1938).

¹⁹ Jonathan Raban, *Soft City*, London, Collins, 1988, p. 18.

chance to escape the stifling conservatism of provincial life dominated by family and church; and the aftershocks of rampant individualism and materialism disturb even the distant Transylvanian hamlet in Dezső Szabó's (1879-1945) infamous portrayal of moral and racial decay in *Az elsodort falu* (The Village That Was Swept Away, 1919), one of the novels I discuss here. In other words, the city was the subtext, if not necessarily the context, for a larger number of works than those discussed here. From the vast amount of writing about Budapest, I have chosen works on the basis of their engagement with the familiar themes of big-city literature, their portrayals of the middle-class concerns axiomatic to the anomalies of rapid urbanisation in Hungary, their intentional morality, and reflections on the character of Budapest. I do not examine in detail works and certain writers whose engagement with the city at a moral level was less explicit.²⁰

My argument is that although the city was so often drawn in negative terms, these texts I discuss here were urban narratives, products of the city itself and its adjunct: writing. It is not my intention to provide an overview of 'Budapest literature' *per se*, or engage with the novels solely on the level of local reception. I do not dispute that there is a long-established distinction in Hungarian literature and thinking between native and alien cultures; or that there is a popular belief among reformists and conservatives alike that the quintessence of the nation resides far from the city. I do not suggest that critiques of the city were misguided, or that they failed to provide a logical alternative, rather that they were part and parcel of the experience of modernity in Hungary. It is short-sighted to read texts as expressions of a straightforward antagonism between rural and urban, or between the national and the cosmopolitan, or between the old and the new. All works of Budapest literature were the fruits of much broader processes of assimilation, of individuals into new collectives. The city offered numerous opportunities for reinvention of the self, mass publishing and dissemination, and served as a referent around/against which to define one's self. If there is a unifying theme that unites the texts I discuss, it is one of a sense of inferiority. Disappointment with the *Weltstadt* found numerous forms: the Hungarian city was not Hungarian enough; the Hungarian city was not Western (read: advanced, modern) enough; it was not unified but disparate; it was

²⁰ For this reason, I do not deal with Gyula Krúdy's (1878-1933) novels in any depth, nor do I discuss the works of Frigyes Karinthy (1887-1938), or the poetry of József Kiss (1843-1921) or Ernő Szép (1884-1953).

uniformly oppressive; it liberated its inhabitants into excess and amorality; its commodification of people and ideas precluded the possibility of true love and true art; it forced its writers to be judged on the basis of their Hungarianness rather than on the quality of their art; it was insufferably snobbish; it had no standards or beauty; it was backwards and provincial, obsessed with tradition, little more than an overgrown village; it pursued novelty for novelty's sake. In any case, the city-subject is one and the same, and because the city was required to perform so many functions and satisfy so many demands, it inevitably produced prose that may have pretended to omniscience, but in fact revealed rather more inconsistencies than they resolved.

The association of urban culture with Jews is omnipresent during the period covered here. Without wanting to turn into the opposite of the Jew-hater, and see antisemitism everywhere, I have chosen not to attempt to discuss the 'Jewish Question' separately, but assume that it is one subtext of the works I discuss. I do not hold that antisemitism and anti-urbanism were one and the same thing. Rather, they served similar impulses, to make sense of things and impose order on the city as place of potential intrigue and danger. 'As discourse, antisemitism had the function of organising knowledge in order to identify the Jewish danger to culture and society; as political mobilisation it aimed to take back the city'.²¹ To this I would only add that the desire to take back the city was also expressed in Hungarian literature, and it is here that the 'Jewish Question' is discussed by other means. András Kovács summarises the pro- and anti-Budapest camps as follows, referring to the simultaneous assimilation of Jews and the creation of modern urban culture. In doing so, he contrasts the bipolar visions of the city. Referring to the simultaneous assimilation of the Jews and the creation of a modern, urban culture, he notes that:

This process was observed with enthusiasm by many, and with antipathy by others. For the Hungarian liberals of the era, the champions of *polgárosodás* and the advocates of Jewish assimilation, Budapest became the symbol of a fertile union and of 'Korrobóri', as a result of which a new branch of Hungarian culture had grown, clinging towards the West. Others, however, were made into bitter opponents of the big city by modernisation's fertile destruction, and the shocks caused by acculturation. For them Budapest had become the symbol of national decay, the ruin of traditional national strata

²¹ Hillel J. Kieval, 'Antisemitism and the City: A Beginner's Guide', pp. 14-15.

and values, and a monster that had opened up endless space for rootless aliens and parasitic ‘colonisers’.²²

Paradoxically, it was because, not in spite of the fact that the capital absorbed hundreds of thousands of new arrivals, that its Hungarian character was secured. In the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of Pest-Buda’s population were German speakers and, until around 1890, German was still spoken at home by most Jewish families. But by 1910, 86 per cent of the city’s inhabitants claimed Hungarian as their mother tongue.²³ Budapest is where people went in search of employment, social elevation, and the opportunity to re-invent themselves.²⁴ The city was the motor of hungarianisation in the Hungarian lands of the Dual Monarchy: unlike Prague or, say, Lublin, cities which both had large Jewish populations, Hungarian Jews wrote in Hungarian, not German or Yiddish.²⁵

In European thought, the city stands for the core of life (culture, law, institutions of power, and so forth), and also artificial life²⁶ (separation from nature, the man-made environment, anonymous relations, and so on). In this thesis I assume that Hungarian urban narratives were informed by a paradoxical relationship with the capital city, and that ‘for two hundred years every Hungarian writer has had a complicated affair with Budapest. They have reviled and glorified it, desired and feared it, they have wanted to conquer it and, on more than one occasion, fallen

²² ‘Sokan lelkesedéssel, mások ellenérzéssel figyelték ezt a folyamatot. A korszak magyar liberálisai, a polgárosodás sürgetői és az asszimiláció zsidó szószólói számára Budapest a termékeny egybeolvadás, a „korrobori” szimbólumává vált, amelynek eredményeként kinőtt a magyar kultúra új, Nyugat felé kapaszkodó ága. Másokat viszont a modernizáció termékeny rombolása, az akkulturáció okozta megrázkódtatások a nagyváros elkeseredett ellenfelévé tettek. Számukra Budapest a nemzeti hanyatlás szimbóluma lett, a hagyományos nemzethordozó rétegeket és értékeket szétdúló és gyökértelen idegeneknek, élősködő „gyarmatosítóknak” végtelen teret nyitó monstrum’. András Kovács, ‘Előszó’ in András Kovács (ed.), *Zsidók Budapesten*, *Budapesti Negyed*, 8, 1995, 2, found online on 1 May 2005 at <http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/08/eloszo.html>

²³ Furthermore, ‘literacy among industrial workers was 87.2 per cent in 1910, high above the national average. Literacy of the inhabitants of Budapest was even higher, as opposed to 59 per cent in the rest of the country in 1900’. See Mario D. Fenyo, ‘Literature and Political Change: Budapest, 1908-1918’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 77, 1987, 6, pp. 1-156 (p. 17).

²⁴ See László Péter and Lóránt Czigány, ‘Urbánusok és népi(es)ek nálunk’ in László Péter, *Az Elbától keletre. Tanulmányok a magyar és kelet-európai történelemből*, Budapest, Osiris, 1998, pp. 379-84.

²⁵ By 1914, one-fifth of Budapest’s population was Jewish, and at the outbreak of the Second World War, the figure stood at almost 25 per cent.

²⁶ ‘Instead of dew there is dust, instead of the fragrance of flowers there is the smell of soap and petroleum, instead of birdsong there is the barrel organ’. (‘Harmat helyett por van, virágillat helyett szappan- és petróleumszag, madárdal helyett verkli’.) Kálmán Mikszáth, *Galamb a kalitkában* [1892], Budapest, Révai, n.d., pp. 34-5.

hopelessly in love with it'.²⁷ I also examine other tensions which came into play in the construction of urban narratives: miscegenation of high and low culture, conflict between generations, and intellectual and social novelties of the capital. I argue that Hungarian urban narratives were resolutely modern attempts to understand and fashion images of the city in a culture in which 'the forms and stabilities of culture itself have often seemed to belong, finally, outside the urban order.'²⁸

I shall now turn to the theoretical, historical and literary background to the subject of this thesis.

Literature Review

Such an era of intensive urbanisation and social flux throughout Europe, naturally, produced robust criticisms of the institutions and symbols of such change. During this period intellectuals had, after all, spent much of their time pondering what, in Georg Simmel's formulation, the effect of the metropolis was on mental life.²⁹ The big city functioned as a uniquely flexible signifier of the conflicting hopes and fears of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fact documented in the vast body of secondary literature on the art of modern urban experience.³⁰ In much of this

²⁷ 'Végeláthatatlan téma. Kétszáz év óta minden magyar író bonyadalmas lelki viszonyt folytat Budapesttel. Gyalázzák és dicsőítik, vágyakoznak utána és félnek tőle, meg akarják hódítani – és nemegyszer belebuknak a reménytelen szerelembe [...] Versek, elbeszélések, vallomások rengetegéből választottam ki néhány példát, hogy ennek a paradox szerelemnek változatait elemezzem'. Balázs Vargha, 'Előszó' in Balázs Vargha, "*Állok Dunánk szélén, a pesti parton...*" *Irodalmi városkép*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1973, p. 5.

²⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism' in Bradbury and McFarlane (eds), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, pp. 96-104 (p. 97).

²⁹ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' [1903], reprinted in Peter Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969, pp. 47-60. For analyses of intellectuals' relationships to the city, see Carl E. Schorske, 'The Idea of the City in European Thought: From Voltaire to Spengler' in Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (eds), *The Historian and the City*, Boston MA, MIT Press, 1963, pp. 95-114; and, for American debates, Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1962.

³⁰ See, for instance, Peter Bartha, *Bely, Joyce and Döblin: City Peripatetics in the City Novel*, Gainesville FL, University Press of Florida, 1996; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London, Verso, 1999; Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991; James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, London, Athlone, 1999; David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, Cambridge MA, Cambridge University Press, 1996; David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, (Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanisation No. 1), Oxford, Blackwell, 1985; Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940*,

literature, however, an invisible line demarcates the cities of modernity (London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Chicago) from everywhere else, although Dublin and St Petersburg occasionally make appearances in honour of seminal novels by James Joyce, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Andrei Bely. More recently, the central European experience of modernity has received scholarly attention, sometimes supplementing, sometimes counteracting the existing tropes of *Großstadt* dysfunction, alienation and the troubled bourgeois self.³¹

The glaring absence of an awareness of nationalist ideologies will strike any reader familiar with central European history while perusing recent Western literature on the city. Because cities are currently *du jour* in academia, writers tend to fetishise the city and (perhaps) consciously ignore what it is not: the deeply unfashionable countryside. Cities do not, however, exist in a vacuum, sealed off from the provinces; nor do they exist only in relation to other cities on some ghostly supranational urban grid. They are sustained by migrations from without, which is why any analysis of urban life and art must acknowledge the human, material and metaphorical relationship between a given city, its hinterland and beyond. In central Europe, the belief that ‘the nation’ resides with the *Volk*, resplendent in their naturally vital state and untainted by alien ideas and governments, had been one of

Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985; Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles CA, University of California Press, 1998; Helen Meller, *European Cities 1890-1930s: History, Culture, and the Built Environment*, Chichester, Wiley, 2001; Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1981; Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housely (eds), *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon and the New Jerusalem*, London, Routledge, 1994; Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis, 1890-1940*, London, Mansell, 1984; Edward Timms and David Kelley (eds), *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London, Fontana, 1985; and Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, New York, Routledge, 1996.

³¹ See John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture*, London, Weidenfeld, 1989; Razvan Paraianu, *Envisioning the City in the Literature of the Early Twentieth Century*, Munich, Slavic Verlag Kovač, 2000; and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981. Works that are closer to my own approach include: Steven Beller (ed.), *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, (Austrian History, Culture and Society Vol. 3), New York, Berghahn, 2001; Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (eds), *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation 1870-1930*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1994; Gábor Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen: Housing and Domestic Culture in Budapest, 1870-1940*, trans. Miklós Bódóczy, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2001; Péter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1998; and Gábor Sánta, “Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa”. *Fejezetek a dualizmus korának Budapest-irodalmából*, Pécs, Pro Pannonia, 2001.

the recurring *topoi* of national mythologies since Herder.³² Nationalisms in central and eastern Europe posited that the common people were the mainspring of the nation; and in Hungary, reformers from the late eighteenth century onwards argued that nation was not only a political but also a spiritual body, incorporating the peasantry.³³ National movements need symbols, such as glorious capital cities but, as Celia Applegate reminds us, it is mistaken to believe that there is an opposition between nationalism and provincialism.³⁴ In central Europe, the desire to make sense of, and impose a feeling of order on the city, was marshalled repeatedly within not only a moralistic, bipolar paradigm, but also the familiar rural-versus-urban dichotomy. Intellectuals from Germany to Russia³⁵ posited that the urban individual, taken to be a male and probably a writer, faced the likelihood of personal disintegration, and herein lay the ‘the need for reintegration through wider participation in a concrete and visible collective whole’.³⁶ The search for wholeness was frequently undertaken by those who were ‘simultaneously proud and resentful of their alienation’,³⁷ intellectuals who espoused anti-intellectualism, and city dwellers

³² Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, abridged and trans. G. O. Churchill, Chicago IL and London, University of Chicago Press, 1968. Originally published as *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91). Herder’s ideas on language and community influenced every national ideology in central and eastern Europe.

³³ One should not use this term loosely. It is supposed to be self-evident in Hungary that the peasantry are poor and live from direct contact with the land. In practice it refers to farmers, agricultural labourers and serfs. György Bessenyi (1718-99), a member of Maria Theresa’s Hungarian bodyguard and progenitor of the Hungarian Enlightenment, popularised the notion that no nation establishes its own culture in a foreign language, that is, German. In *Magyarság* (1778) he argued that the concept of the *nemzet* (political nation) should be extended to include serfs, those ‘trustees’ of Hungarian culture. See *Bessenyei György válogatott írásai* (György Bessenyei’s Selected Writings), ed. László Vajthó, Budapest, Magyar Helikon, 1961.

³⁴ See Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*, Berkeley CA, California University Press, 1990.

³⁵ For excellent analyses of German nationalism see: Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1974; Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996; and George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York, Fertig, 1998. For Russian debates, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Philosophy of the Russian Populists*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1969 and Franco Venturi, *The Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, London, Phoenix, 2001.

³⁶ Lewis Mumford, ‘What is a City?’, *Architectural Record*, LXXXII, 1937, pp. 184-88, cited in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (eds), *The City Reader*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 185.

³⁷ Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, p. 268.

who were the primary producers and consumers of diatribes against the corrupting influence of the cosmopolis.³⁸

It might initially be tempting to divide representations of cities (or whatever settlements and communities have been referred to as such over time) into two neat, opposing camps.³⁹ On the one hand, the city may be seen as the source of light and progress, a refuge from what Marx termed the idiocy of rural life.⁴⁰ The city may be embraced for its diversity of pleasures; concentration of peoples, cultures and voices; opportunities for the (re-)creation of the self; or as the result of a desire to improve life and its institutions: 'If cities are civilisation, they are also the cultural instrumentality by which humanity has attempted, since Neolithic times, to achieve a higher, more inclusive concept of humanity'.⁴¹ On the other hand, the city may be a symbol of man's estrangement from God; a place where everything is for sale; a place of bloodletting, sin and folly; 'the first to be struck in the war between the Lord and the powers of the world'.⁴² For many, big cities were the 'unnatural setting for the anonymous interaction of an alienated population'.⁴³ Even before

³⁸ Simmel notes: 'The atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture is one reason for the bitter hatred which the preachers of the most extreme individualism, above all Nietzsche, harbour against the metropolis. But it is, indeed, also a reason why these preachers are so passionately loved in the metropolis and why they appear to the metropolitan man as the prophets and saviours of his most unsatisfied yearnings'. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 59.

³⁹ Raymond Williams opens his study of the images of city and countryside with the following description of the rural/urban dichotomy: 'On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times'. Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 1. This dichotomy in the Hungarian context is described by István Deák as follows: 'Democrats, Westernizers and other urban intellectuals tend to see the city as an agency for civilization and progress in a rather crude, primitive and slow-moving country, and to deny that Budapest has ever been politically dominant. Traditionalists, conservatives, agrarian socialists and populists on the other hand, tend to argue that Budapest has corrupted and exploited the countryside, and has often decisively influenced national politics'. Istvan Deak, 'Budapest: a dominant capital in a dominated country?' in Steven Bela Vardy and Agnes Huszar Vardy (eds), *Society in Change: Studies in Honor of Béla K. Király*, Boulder CO, East European Monographs, 1983, pp. 315-26 (p. 315).

⁴⁰ 'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life'. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, London, Phoenix, 1996, p. 10.

⁴¹ Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, 'Introduction' in LeGates and Stout (eds), *The City Reader*, pp. 12-30 (p. 16).

⁴² Jacques Ellul writing on Babylon in *The Meaning of the City*, trans. D. Pardee, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1970, p. 5, cited in Lees, *Cities Perceived*, p. 7.

⁴³ John Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 44.

industrialisation, cities were not exempt from being associated with chaos and trade in commodities of questionable moral character: ‘The Venice which Elizabethans saw in their imagination was a place of enormous riches earned by contact with [...] heathens and infidels, wealth flowing from dealings with the Other’.⁴⁴

In his influential 1963 essay ‘The Idea of the City in European Thought: From Voltaire to Spengler’, Carl Schorske outlines three strands in European dialogues with urban life since the eighteenth century. The first presented the city as civilised virtue, industry and higher culture, a view formulated by the Enlightenment thinkers Voltaire, Adam Smith and Fichte.⁴⁵ The second, a counter-current to the first, excoriated the city as the source of all vice. A fear of ‘mammonism’, a revolt against mechanistic rationalism, or a cult of Nature, then, were to be found in the ideas of Engels, the English Romantic poets, Freytag, Langbehn, Proudhon, Tolstoy and Zola. The third mode of thought placed the city, the ‘essential ground of modern existence’, beyond good and evil. Schorske cites Baudelaire and Rilke, Nietzsche and Spengler, as authors who ‘challenged the validity of traditional morality, social thought, and art’, and for whom the city must be experienced fully in one’s own person.⁴⁶ Schorske concedes that his short essay is necessarily superficial. My criticism, however, is that all three strands may be located in the output of one writer, or even within one single work. Because, in Schorske’s words, ‘without the dazzling picture of the city as virtue, inherited from the Enlightenment, the image of the city as vice would hardly have achieved so firm a grip on the European mind’,⁴⁷ and there

⁴⁴ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation*, London, Faber, 1996, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Fichte proposes a compelling interpretation of the German city as ‘a pure creation of the German Volk’. Schorske, ‘The Idea of the City’, p. 101. In *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (1807-08), Fichte had associated the Hanseatic city with virtue, communitarianism and democracy: ‘By extolling the burgher-city as a model ethical community, Fichte introduced ideal standards for the later critique of the nineteenth-century city as a centre of capitalist individualism’. Schorske, ‘The Idea of the City’, p. 102.

⁴⁶ “‘What is modern?’ The intellectual transvaluators gave a new centrality to the question. They asked not, “What is good and bad about modern life?” but, “What is it? What true, what false?” [...] Perhaps we can most readily distinguish the new attitude from the older ones by examining the city’s place in relation to the ordinance of time. Earlier urban thinking had placed the modern city in phased history: between a benighted past and a rosy future (the Enlightenment view) or as a betrayal of the golden past (the anti-industrial view). For the new culture, by contrast, the city had no structured temporal locus between past and future, but rather a temporal quality. The modern city offered an eternal *hic et nunc*, whose content was transience, but whose transience was permanent. The city presented a succession of variegated, fleeting moments, each to be savoured in its passage from non-existence to oblivion’. Ibid., pp. 109-10.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

is no reason why one might not imagine the city as corrupt, while at the same time, in theory, perfectible. By attempting to portray Budapest as a one-dimensional place or, rather, by writing prose in order to illustrate a moral of the condemnatory variety, authors were denying their individual ambiguity to the city. I shall return to the pose of the redeemer in works discussed in chapters one, three and four.

The provisional and dynamic properties of the modern urban novel tended to frustrate the quest for a total vision, an ultimate homecoming or a lasting knowledge. This did nothing to stop Hungarian writers trying. Now that the dominant *topos* was of a space which conflated public and private, 'even within "private" space of the home, its dwellers [were] exposed to the gaze of strangers. This [had] the effect of domesticating the street, making the city a wellspring of desire and identity'.⁴⁸ In the works I discuss, Budapest was presented as something of a vanity fair; a shop-window display; a kaleidoscope of unusual characters in numerous unnatural locations doing tantalisingly unwholesome things to one another. Yet the quest to make sense of all this, and to discover new forms of community within this milieu, was also present.

What took place in Hungary was a steady dislocation between an idea of the capital, the locus and source of all things modern, and an idea of the nation, that repository of all things supposedly traditional and good. Irrespective of whether the Hungarian national self-image was informed by the values of the gentry or a fantastic image of the *Volk*, the one belief common to all nationalist mythologies from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards was that the Hungarian is fundamentally not an urban creature.⁴⁹ In an era when much time and effort were expended elaborating on national character and fate, the national character of the capital was also in question. The cities, and especially capital cities of central Europe, functioned as metaphors for modernity (and, therefore, the West), while also being required to function as jewels in the national crown; a showcase for everything that is *sui generis* in a given national collective. In other words, in the period covered here, the city was

⁴⁸ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ For contemporary analyses of this belief, see Tamás Hofer, 'The "Hungarian Soul" and the "Historic Layers of National Heritage": Conceptualisations of Hungarian Folk Culture, 1880-1944', and Zsigmond Pál Pach, 'Business Mentality and the Hungarian National Character' in Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (eds), *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, (Yale Russian and East European Publications No. 13), New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 65-81 and pp. 83-101.

in a double bind: it was supposed to represent the universal (the capital as centre of national institutions, progress, learning, and so on) and the particular (be it the cultural supremacist goals of the Hungarian state or as the unlikely location for a showcase of Magyar *Eigenschaften*), and it was this paradox that shaped urban narratives during this period.

In *The Image of the City in Literature*, Burton Pike argues that within a literary work, the image of a city becomes part of a coherent system of signs, and 'its meanings may only be tenuously involved with the empirical city itself [...] It is clear that the city evoked in words, especially in a fictional text, is toponymical rather than topographical.⁵⁰ The relationship between the real (world-) city and the 'word-city', then, is only indirect, although the latter must be comprehensible to readers who are neither compatriots nor contemporaries of the author. Pike argues that in the novel, because the emphasis is on flux rather than stasis, the existence of the private individual in the traditional home setting is undermined.

The middle-class literature of Budapest illustrates such dilemmas of public and private life and, in prose, the ongoing process of *polgárosodás* at the individual level.⁵¹ To be middle class in Hungary during this period was to enjoy a somewhat uncertain and incipient form of social prestige, described by Sándor Márai (1900-89) in *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a Bourgeois, 1934-5) as an 'uras, zsíros élet',⁵² roughly, a distinguished, greasy, materialistic life. According to András Gerő, the middle class 'encompassed a wide range of people from the petty bourgeoisie to the upper middle classes, from employees in the private sector to skilled workers

⁵⁰ Pike, *The Image of the City in Literature*, pp. ix, 12. For instance, 'Dostoevsky evokes a thematically coherent city in the text itself, which makes sense a century later to readers in other countries'. Ibid., p. 12.

⁵¹ *Polgárosodás* is the process of becoming middle class, and often implies the adoption and adaptation of ways of life that originated in the West. 'Útjaiknak s azok megörökítésének időszerű politikai, társadalmi reformer célja volt: látni, felszívni, töltekezni, hazahozni s idehaza megavalósítani mindazt, amit az európai, kivált a nyugati – angol, francia – kultúra, a polgárosodás folyamata felhalmozott'. István Fenyő, 'A polgárosodás eszmevilága útjajzainkban 1848 előtt' in István Fenyő, *Két évtized. Tanulmányok és kritikák*, Budapest, Magvető, 1968, pp. 109-29 (p. 109). Frigyes Riedl provides an ironic account of the success of imported values: 'Az idegen eszmék és érzések, melyeket a földrajzi felfedezések kora szült, betódulnak az egyvelőkbe és innen a magyar könyvekbe ép úgy, mint a Kolumbusz felfedezte világrész növényei: a tengeri, az akácza, a dohány, a burgonya, gyökeret eresztenek a magyar Alföld homokában'. Frigyes Riedl, *A magyar irodalom főirányai*, Budapest, Franklin, 1910, p. 7.

⁵² Sándor Márai, *Egy polgár vallomásai I-II*, Budapest, Helikon, 2003, p. 32.

who had risen to the lower middle classes simply by virtue of wearing a hat'.⁵³ The middle classes had much to gain from the growth and diversity of the city. Competition for professional positions was fierce, and those who styled themselves as the historic middle class (read: non-Jewish) were particularly eager to remake Budapest in their own image.⁵⁴

In the period covered here, Budapest was perceived as polyvalent and chaotic, and its plural character was both embraced and called into question by intellectuals who may have feared, resented, admired and depended on its dynamism and heterogeneity all at once.⁵⁵ This ambiguity towards the city was summarised in 1908 by Aladár Schöpfung (1872-1950), writing in *Nyugat*:

With some sort of strange, sick magic, Rome and Byzantium attracted groups of travellers from beyond the Alps and the Balkans [...] who wanted to see, with their own eyes, that which they so hungrily despised: the great reservoir of opulent treasures, marble palaces, the countless meeting places of heavenly ladies and weak men, the never-seen riches, never-heard-of crimes and never-enjoyed pleasures: the city. They desired and despised it, they wanted to conquer it in order to pillage its treasures, to choke its men in their weakness, to luxuriate in its pleasures and incur eternal damnation upon its failings.⁵⁶

Schöpfung continues, saying that the barbarians from the East despised and envied the men they found in the city, because they had been weakened by pleasures of the

⁵³ András Gerő, *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Process*, trans. James Patterson and Enikő Koncz, Budapest, Central European University Press, 1995, p. 7.

⁵⁴ One stratum 'grievously affected by the process [of the 1848 emancipation of the serfs and redistribution of land suitable for cultivation] was the overwhelming majority, about four-fifths, of the roughly 140,000 noble families, which did not possess sufficient manorial land to sustain their former status as "genteel landowners". They lost free labour while they did not gain credit [...]. Many of these nobles ended up in the ranks of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie or the "genteel middle class" of officers, public servants and intellectuals, while preserving a great deal of their former attitudes of social superiority'. Kontler, *A Millennium in Central Europe*, pp. 289-90.

⁵⁵ A similar argument is advanced by Morton and Lucia White in the context of American anti-urbanism(s): 'The American city has been criticised by writers who doubted or despised the values of civilisation, as well as by writers who were intensely dedicated to civilised life. In short, the American city has been caught in the crossfire of two powerful antagonists – primitivists and sophisticates; and no mechanical recitation of the misleading aphorism that like effects are produced by like causes can gainsay this fact.' White and White, *The Intellectual Versus The City*, p. 225. I discuss gendered representations of the city (Madonna/Whore) in Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ 'Róma, Bizánc valami különös, beteg varázssal vont a népvándorlás kóbor csapatait. Átvergődtek az Alpeseiken, a Balkán hegyein-hágóin [...] csak hogy meglássák, amit sóvárogva gyűlöltek, a dús kincsek, márványok paloták, tündéri asszonyok és puha férfiak rengeteg gyülekezőhelyét, a soha nem látott gazdagság, soha nem hallott bűnök, soha nem élvezett gyönyörök nagy gyűjtőmedencéjét: a várost. Vágytak rá és gyűlöltek, meg akarták hódítani, hogy kierőszakolják kincseit, puhaságukba fojtsák férjait, tobzódjanak gyönyöreiben, és elkárhozzanak vétkeiben'. Aladár Schöpfung, 'A város', *Nyugat*, 1 April 1908, 7, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, edited by Aladár Komlós, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1967, pp. 30-41, reprinted in *Esszépanoráma 1900-1944*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1978, pp. 132-43 (p. 133).

flesh. ‘Perhaps it was then that the primary principle of cultural life first sprang forth from them: discord with oneself. [...]. [P]erhaps it was between the walls of the despised and hungered-for city that they first noticed that it is possible to love and hate one thing at the same time, to desire it and be repulsed by it.’⁵⁷ Schöpflin’s argument rests on assumptions typical of his time: that Western civilisation is based on cities, and the city makes its own rules; the Hungarian on the other hand had no urban culture;⁵⁸ and that his generation had not yet adjusted sufficiently to urban life. He argues however that Budapest, while non-Hungarian in origin, had become an integral part of the nation and its people and literature represented new forms of Hungarian-ness. Schöpflin’s article also highlights the duality in human nature, the ambiguity towards the city that many writers of the period covered here attempted to deny.

I shall now provide some historical context to the subject of this thesis.

History of the city and its literature

The fortified town of Buda dates back to the mid-thirteenth century, and was the favoured residence for king and court almost continuously until 1918. Pest, on the flat, eastern bank of the Danube, began to expand in the second half of the fifteenth century, a Hungarian-speaking and trade-centred rival to mainly German Buda. The university founded at Nagyszombat (today’s Trnava) in 1635 moved to Buda in 1777, bringing with it printing presses and libraries and, in 1784, Joseph II made Buda the political capital of Hungary. Since 1526 Pressburg, today’s Bratislava and a few miles from Nagyszombat, had been the administrative centre, and Pest-Buda was designated the capital from 1848 to 1873. It was in the mid-eighteenth century that Pest’s population first exceeded that of Buda, and the middle-class districts of Terézváros, Erzsébetváros and Lipótváros, and the working-class Józsefváros and Ferencváros were built. Buda stagnated somewhat following the flood of 1838, after which much of Pest was rebuilt, and the implementation of projects including public

⁵⁷ ‘Talán ekkor pattant ki belőlük a kultúrélet első alapeleme: az önmagában való meghasonlás [...] talán a gyűlölt és sóvárgott város falai alatt vették észre először, hogy lehet ugyanazon egy dolgot egyszerre szeretni és gyűlölni, vágyani rá és undorodni tőle’. Ibid., pp. 133-34.

⁵⁸ Schöpflin argues that any urban life in Hungary was German in origin, and/or destroyed by the Turks.

transport, a sewerage system and street lighting continued during the years of neo-absolutism following the 1848/49 revolutions. The city's emblematic role in Hungarian literature developed alongside the city's physical growth. From the 1820s onwards, Pest was the centre of literary life in Hungary: publication became a profitable business, professional journalism sustained many a writer, and a proliferation of literary journals and magazines charted the arrival of urban life in literature, usually in the form of sketches.⁵⁹

One of the earliest associations between the city and text appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century, in János Garay's (1812-53) essay 'Street Life' (1846), in which he claimed that Pest should be compared to a book, the cover of which is the splendid row of houses along the Danube; punctuation is provided by the streets, junctions, markets and cemeteries; cafés, casinos and the bridges are the hyphens; and the letters are the inhabitants whose lives form the words, the story of the city.⁶⁰ Influenced in particular by Eugène Sue's Parisian novels, Garay, Lázár Horváth Petrichevich (1807-51) and Ignác Nagy (1810-54) wrote quaintly moralising stories about a city comprised of a number of villages, in which rural space and time still existed, but which was also less Hungarian than other towns such as Nagyvárád and Debrecen, according to Horváth Petrichevich in 1843.⁶¹ The embrace of Pest-Buda continued until the 1850s when Mór Jókai (1825-1904), one of the most popular writers of the nineteenth century, declared that 'every nation has its sacred city, of which it thinks with reverence and pride [...] The Magyar should also be free to feel sweet pleasure when he thinks of Pest'.⁶² There was, according to Jókai, a fashion among the landed gentry for spending time in Pest-Buda, which was already able to

⁵⁹ Early examples include: Péter Vajda, *Pesti levelek*, Košice, Literaturai Intézet, 1835-37; Lázár Horváth Petrichevich, *Az elbujdosott vagy egy tél a fővárosban*, Cluj, Tilsch, 1836; Ignác Nagy, *Uracskok, arszlánnők. Budapesti életképek 1840-1848*, ed. Gábor Szigethy, Budapest, Magvető, 1980; Lajos Kuthy, *Hazai rejtelmek* (first published in 1846-47), Budapest, Franklin, 1906.

⁶⁰ János Garay, 'Utczai élet' [1846] in János Garay, *Összes munkái*, Budapest, Méhner, 1886-87, vol. 5, pp. 249-52. See chapter 2.

⁶¹ 'Nagyvárád, Szathmár, Debrecen még egészen magyarok, míg Pest-Buda és azontúl város több-kevésbé magyartalan'. Lázár Horváth Petrichevich, 'A magyar nyelvről s a magyar irodalom hátramaradásának némely okairól' (On the Hungarian Language and Some Reasons for the Backwardness of Hungarian Literature), *Honderű*, 4 November 1843, pp. 553-62, cited in Sánta, "Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa", p. 31.

⁶² 'Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa, melyre kegylettel, büszkeséggel gondol [...] Szabad legyen a magyarnak is édes örömet érzi, midőn Pestre gondol'. Mór Jókai writing in *Pesti Napló* (Pest Diary), 1854, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 36. See also László Berza (ed.), *Jókai Mór Budapestje. Jókai Mór születésének 150. évfordulójára*, Budapest, Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, 1975.

compete with Paris and London in terms of entertainments for the nobles. Literary activity intensified in the 1860s: the establishment of the Dual Monarchy fuelled industrialisation and the emergence and growth of the urban working classes, while the expansion of trade, education and state bureaucracy in turn required a large professional clerical middle class. Rivalling Vienna as a major centre of trade and industry, the city's ethnic and linguistic composition also underwent rapid change.

Physical remains of the medieval or Baroque city scarcely stood in the way of the modernisers, allowing them to give free rein to their imaginations. Within a few decades Budapest [...] developed into a metropolis, the Hungarian bastion of capitalism, and [...] used its very 'lack of a past' for its own ends. Budapest as a 'brand new' capital, with its population of fresh immigrants, [became] one of the most important repositories of modernity in the Central European region.⁶³

While Budapest was busy inventing itself, the Hungarian reading public was enjoying light-hearted short stories and tales of gentry antics. Meanwhile, perhaps one of the earliest fruits of this central European modernity were *élclapok* (*élc* meaning witticism, thus an *élclap* is a satirical paper), pioneered by the appearance of *Borsszem Jankó* (Tom Thumb) in 1867, established by the Prime Minister Count Gyula Andrássy (1823-90) and edited by Adolf Ágai (1836-1916), one of the authors discussed in my first chapter. Written and published in Budapest, these papers pioneered the use of frequently lamentable humour and stereotypes of national minorities to criticise the government and society of the day.⁶⁴ The caricatures of the *élclapok* reflected the fact that the capital's press was already a stage for a contest of Hungarian-ness. Their success illustrated the quixotic nature of this Central European modernity: they were pioneered by liberals and Jews, but eventually ranked among the loudest anti-assimilation voices in the press, railing against tolerance towards all national minorities at the end of the nineteenth century. In other

⁶³ Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen*, p. xix.

⁶⁴ The earliest satirical weekly was *Üstökös* (Comet). It was established in 1858, edited by Mór Jókai and supported Jewish assimilation in the 1860s, and the reception of Judaism in the 1880s. The other papers, which were denominational and anti-liberal, in ascending order of levels of antisemitism, were: *Bolond Istók* (Foolish Exclamations), established in 1879, opposed the government and was frequently vulgar in tone; *Füstölő* (Smoker) which appeared through the 1880s on the back of the Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel Trial and the short-lived National Antisemites' Party under Győző Iszóczy; and *Herkó Páter* (Pater Herkó), an ultramontane right-wing paper which peddled the most extreme antisemitic imagery of any *élclap*. See two works by Géza Buzinkay: *Borsszem Jankó és társai. Magyar élclapok és karikatúrák a XIX. század második felében*, Budapest, Corvina, 1983; and *Mokány Berczi és Spitzig Iczig. Göre Gábor meg a többiek. A magyar társadalom figurái az élclapokban 1860 és 1918 között*, Budapest, Magvető, 1988.

words, innovative urban forms of writing and dissemination of information and opinion played a role in the representation of the city as a parvenu, chaotic and even dangerous place.

It was just before the turn of the century that the transformations of public space became established in literature. David Harvey argues that late nineteenth-century Paris witnessed a shift from ‘the introverted, private and personalised urbanism of the July Monarchy to an extroverted, public and collective style of urbanism under the Second Empire [in which the boulevards] became corridors of homage to the power of money and commodities, play spaces for the bourgeoisie’.⁶⁵ A similar transformation was engineered in Budapest roughly between 1873 and 1896, not only motivated by the desire to ‘isolate the sources of infection, the working-class areas, from the richer districts, and to reduce the risk of infection by creating a basic urban infrastructure’,⁶⁶ but also to bestow on the city a grandiose appearance, as well as an homogenous, official national culture on an otherwise diverse and heterogeneous population.⁶⁷ Budapest city planners together with private entrepreneurs implemented grand building schemes, providing water mains, sewerage and gas mains, a tram network, street lighting, and three bridges linking Buda and Pest by the 1890s. The Municipal Board of Works (*Fővárosi Közmunkatanács*), established in 1867, was overseen by the Prime Minister, autonomous from city government and run by elected officials chosen from among the 1,200 citizens paying the highest taxes.⁶⁸ It directed city development and oversaw the building programmes for the millennial celebrations of 1896,⁶⁹ including

⁶⁵ Harvey, *Consciousness and Urban Experience*, p. 204.

⁶⁶ Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ The extraordinarily high rates of state intervention in urban planning in central Europe are explained by Peter Hall as follows: (i) governments feared concentrations of political radicalism in densely-populated, poor inner cities; (ii) they wanted to bestow a grandiose outward appearance on the cities; and (iii) they wanted to restrict the autonomy of large cities so that they would not rise too far above (or away from) the provinces, as in the case of ‘Red Vienna’, for example. See Peter Hall, ‘Metropolis 1890-1940: Challenges and Responses’ in Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis*, pp. 19-66.

⁶⁸ According to Vörös, at the end of the Great War, only 8-9 per cent of the population of Budapest owned property and therefore had the vote. See Károly Vörös, ‘From City to Metropolis (1849-1919)’ in Ságvári (ed.), *Budapest: History of a Capital*, pp. 37-46 (p. 43).

⁶⁹ In February 1896, the following building projects were being undertaken: the Vajdahunyad castle in the Városliget, the high court, the Parliament, five district market halls, Ferenc József bridge, the electrification of tramways and the underground railway. See Zoltán Horváth, *Magyar századforduló. A második reformnemzedék története (1896-1914)*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1974, p. 152.

the underground railway, Andrásy Street, the Városliget⁷⁰ (City Park), and that ‘orgy of self-congratulation’,⁷¹ the Millennium Exposition. Budapest was the apex of all things great and Hungarian in that year, when people flocked in their thousands to the capital to take part in the patriotic festivities and enjoy the purpose-built displays of that imperial face of the city described by Antal Szerb (1901-45) in *Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára* (1935), one of the works I discuss in chapter two. Such ostentatious segments of public spaces were, in Harvey’s words, bourgeois interiors, miniature stages for displays of personal wealth, but this did not pass without comment from the anti-government press.

For many, Budapest was the loud, discordant note destroying the beautiful Hungarian symphony of gentry, government official, landowner, smallholder and peasant. Ironically, Budapest’s population increase in density and diversity was interpreted by those troubled by the city’s growth as proof of its uniformity: the capital simply lacked all ‘Hungarian’ character and was alien to the body of the nation. The historian Gyula Szekfű (1883-1955) wrote that the *magyarság*⁷² of János Arany (1817-82) would not have found any place in the Budapest of the millennium celebrations; the educated Hungarian middle class was proud of its spoilt pet city, and had turned its back in scorn on the ‘mongrel’ Hungarian who saw his capital’s culture as nothing but the ‘depository for Berlin and Vienna’s big-city culture, its second-rank distinguished branch’.⁷³ According to this view, Budapest’s relentless ‘busyness’ meant that in cultural terms, it specialised in quantity, not quality - the terrain of so-called national genius. After the Great War and the revolutions of

⁷⁰ Budapest’s Embellishment Committee organised possibly the first competition in the history of landscape architecture ever held in 1813, and commissioned Christian Heinrich Nebbien to design the Városliget. He ‘sought to create a public space that was “the purest expression of the greatest values of a people and the product of the spirit, the taste, the patriotism and the culture of a noble nation.”’ Meller, *European Cities 1890-1930s*, p. 110.

⁷¹ William M. Johnson, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938*, Berkeley and Los Angeles CA, University of California Press, 1983, p. 343.

⁷² Like the German *Deutschtum*, *magyarság* denotes all Hungarians everywhere, or the qualities of being Hungarian, or both.

⁷³ ‘Ne tagadjuk, a művelt magyar középosztály büszke volt fővárosára, kényeztetett kedvencére, és megvetéssel fordult volna el attól a korcsmagyartól, ki Budapest kultúrájában egyebet nem látott volna, mint a berlini és bécsi nagyvárosi kultúrának lerakatát, másodfokúan előkelő fióküzletét’. Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*, Budapest, Királyi Magyar Egyetemi, 1935, p. 343.

1918/1919, antisemitic overtones to this distinction between quantity and quality dominated.⁷⁴

By the 1910s, Budapest literature, and consciously modern literary and cultural institutions, were already well-established. *A Hét* (The Week) provided a forum for the younger generation of born-and-bred city writers to experiment with Naturalism and Realism. In 1900, the periodical *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century) was founded by the liberal politician Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957), with a warm endorsement from flavour-of-the-age Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), aimed at introducing the social sciences to a Hungarian readership, and in 1908 the most important modern literary review *Nyugat* (West), was launched. In the fourth issue, the editor Ignó (Hugo Veigelsberg, 1869-1949)⁷⁵ summarised contemporary resentment directed against the city and, by extension, *Nyugat* itself:

Budapest is not Hungarian. The language of Pest is not Hungarian. Nationalisation of public administration is not Hungarian. The stock exchange is not Hungarian. Socialism is not Hungarian. Internationalism is not Hungarian. Organisation of agricultural workers is not Hungarian. Flexible capital is not Hungarian. The Secession and Symbolism are not Hungarian. It is not Hungarian to conduct research along non-denominational lines, nor to exclude religion from education. Sarcasm is not Hungarian. Greater tolerance in morals of love is not Hungarian. Universal suffrage is not Hungarian. Materialism is not Hungarian, but nor is it Hungarian to suppose that people create or may change their institutions and sacraments, according to reason or needs. And first and foremost: he who is not satisfied with our state of affairs is not Hungarian and, if he were at all respectable, he would leave the country with which he is so displeased.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Richard Wagner (1813-83) had alerted his compatriots', and Hungarians', attention to the supposed judaisation (*Verjudung*) of art in his 1850 essay 'Das Judenthum in der Musik'. See Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music and Other Essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Lincoln NE, University of Nebraska Press, 1995. The novelist László Németh (1901-75) pursued the notion of quantity opposed to quality by naming his collected political essays *A minőség forradalma* (The Revolution of Quality), 2 vols, Budapest, Magyar Élet, 1943.

⁷⁵ It was in the pages of *Nyugat* that works by Endre Ady, Attila József and Zsigmond Móricz (and others) received wide attention. The fact that many of the major pioneers of modern Hungarian literature and social sciences (József Kiss, Oszkár Jászi, Ignó) were Jewish, however, was easily interpreted as proof that Jews made commodities out of the products of national genius.

⁷⁶ 'Nem magyar Budapest. Nem magyar a pesti nyelv. Nem magyar a közigazgatás államosítása. Nem magyar a börze. Nem magyar a szocializmus. Nem magyar a nemzetköziség. Nem magyar a mezőgazdasági munkások szervezkedése. Nem magyar a mozgó tőke. Nem magyar a szecesszió s a szimbolizmus. Nem magyar a felekezetek kihagyása a kutatásból, a vallás elhagyása a tanításból. Nem magyar a gúnyolódás. Nem magyar a türelmesebb szerelmi erkölcs. Nem magyar az általános választójog. Nem magyar a materializmus, de nem magyar az a feltevés sem, hogy az emberek eszük és szükségük szerint teremtették és alakíthatják intézményeiket sőt szentségeiket is. S főképp: nem magyar az, akit nem boldogítanak a mi állapotaink, s legyen benne annyi becsület, hogy hagyja itt ezt az országot, mellyel elégedetlen.' Ignó, 'A magyar kultúra s a nemzetiségek', *Nyugat*, 4, 16

A distinction between ‘national’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ literature had been maintained by critics such as Pál Gyulai (1826-1909) and Zsolt Beöthy (1848-1922), and was to a certain extent reinforced by Ignotus, who noted in 1895 that the narrow, folkish-national trend wished to ‘erase the homeland’s capital city from its geography’.⁷⁷ Up to the end of the Great War, the dominant accusation levelled against Budapest was that it was estranged from the body of the nation; the city had turned its back on the soil and its people, and in return, the ‘nation’ denied, or ignored, the city.

The radicalisation of Budapest’s image as home to all things un-Hungarian came about at the end of the Great War. Increasingly acute mass dissatisfaction had found one form of universal expression: antisemitism. In 1917, following the publication of Péter Ágoston’s (1874-1925) *A zsidóság útja* (The Path of Jewry), in which it was argued that Jews were responsible for the problems of assimilation (and therefore for antisemitism), the editors of *Huszadik Század* felt that the time was ripe to debate the nature of, reasons for and possible solutions to the existence of the ‘Jewish Question’ in Hungary. Of the sixty prominent Jewish and non-Jewish authors, clerics, academics, lawyers and journalists asked whether they thought there was a Jewish Question in Hungary, and if so, what caused and would solve it, more than fifty answered that there was.⁷⁸ Opinions differed about who was responsible, although it is fair to say that the majority of non-Jewish respondents attempted to absolve themselves, individually and collectively, of any (and all) responsibility for its existence. The collapse of the Dual Monarchy, followed by the revolutions of 1918/1919, ensured that the *Dolchstoßlegende*, the popular German myth that the Jews had stabbed the nation in the back, enjoyed a warm reception in Hungary. The establishment of Horthy’s regency was accompanied by the ‘White Terror’, in which socialists and Jews were rounded up and killed across the country. The Anti-Jewish *numerus clausus* in higher education was introduced in 1920,⁷⁹ hot on the heels of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon which not only guaranteed the rights of

February 1908, reprinted in *Nyugat 1908-1929. Válogatás. Viták, programok, kritikák*, ed. Zoltán Kenyeres, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1988, pp. 14-16 (pp. 15-16).

⁷⁷ ‘[...] a maga tulajdon hazája fővárosát akarja a geográfiából kitörölni’. Ignotus, *A Hét*, 1895, no. 4, p. 65, cited in Horváth, *Magyar századforduló*, p. 159.

⁷⁸ See Péter Hanák (ed.), *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus. Tanulmányok a zsidókérdésről a huszadik századi Magyarországon*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1984.

⁷⁹ See Katalin Szegvári, *Numerus clausus rendelkezések az ellenforradalmi Magyarországon* (*Numerus Clausus Measures in Counter-Revolutionary Hungary*), Budapest, Akadémiai, 1988.

minorities, but also cut Hungary's population by two-thirds and its territory by three-quarters. At the stroke of a pen, Hungary went from being a large, multinational state to a small, homogenous one in which the Jews were now regarded as significantly other.⁸⁰ Budapest, and rump Hungary as a whole, proved rather too small to accommodate the influx of unemployed civil servants and military personnel from former Hungarian territories; these provided the backbone of the radical Right in the interwar years. Their rhetoric and activities, and governments' increasing determination to appease them with antisemitic legislation, pushed the 'Jewish Question' to the centre of the political agenda. Péter Hanák writes that before 1918, the word *faj* (race) had only referred to an ethnic minority or group, but now denoted fixity, and necessary conflict.⁸¹ However, *faj* had already been used in the 1880s, during and following the Tiszaeszlár blood libel trials, to describe qualities that were supposedly inborn as opposed to learned, or at the very least, acquirable.⁸² What was certain, was that Jews and, by association, Budapest, had become synonymous with an unholy, un-Hungarian mix of 'isms': materialism, liberalism, Communism, capitalism, internationalism.

The 'Budapest spirit' became the 'whipping-boy' of Horthy's Hungary.⁸³ In his article 'Bűnös Budapest' (Sinful Budapest, 1920), István Turcsányi (1899-1975) wrote that the Magyar, whose memory was ancient and eternal, had now come to hate the city, and would or could not forget its offences, but would struggle, as a matter of conscience, for Budapest to become 'carefree, gay and happy-go-lucky'.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See Rafael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology*, Detroit MI, Wayne State University Press, 1996.

⁸¹ 'Az egykorú szóhasználat illetően érdemes előjáróban megjegyezni, hogy a közéleti szótárban a "faj", a "fajta" fogalomhoz nem tapadt a későbbi fajgyűlölő rasszizmus fogalomértelmezése. 1918 előtt a faj szót általában a "nemzetiség", az "etnikum" értelmében használták.' Péter Hanák, 'A zsidókérdés Magyarországon. A Huszadik Század körkérdése' in Hanák (ed.), *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus*, pp. 13-16 (p. 16). However, in his 1908 essays 'A város', Aladár Schöpfung describes rural Hungarians as *fajbeli* or *törzsökös magyarok*; and those who live in Budapest as *megmagyarosodott idegen fajbeliek*. See footnote 29.

⁸² See the relevant chapter(s) in János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon. Politikai eszmétörténet* (The Jewish Question in Hungary: History of a Political Idea), Budapest, Osiris, 2001; Judit Kubinszky, *Politikai antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1875-1890*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1976; and Vera Ránki, *Magyarok, zsidók, nacionalizmus. A befogadás és kirekesztés politikája*, Budapest, Új Mandátum, 1999.

⁸³ Paul Ignatus, *Hungary*, London, Benn, 1972, p. 151.

⁸⁴ '[A] "gondtalan, vidám, könnyelmű" Budapest'. István Turcsányi, 'Bűnös Budapest', *Gondolat*, August 1920, reprinted in Ágnes Ságvári (ed.), *Források Budapest multjából*, Vol. 3, Budapest, Budapest Főváros Levéltára, pp. 66-68 (p. 67).

The city was over-convinced that it belonged to the West, and at the same time, was entirely without character. 'Its culture was nothing more than cynical arrogance, its existence nothing more than immorality, its art but a loud-mouthed advertisement'.⁸⁵ It projected its ridiculous cult of personality onto the countryside and despised everything which took place outside the boundaries of the *urbs*; it only knew the village and its residents, that is, the true Hungarian man, from anecdotes; and the countryman became a simple-minded, imbecile, uncultured and gullible character, good only for appearing in the disgustingly tasteless comic rags consumed with gusto by the sick-minded urban population. Like a parasite, the capital had sucked all the energy, strength, ability and, ultimately, life, from the countryside. Crucially, 'the Magyar spirit, heart, voice and eye were only Magyar up to the point they ended up in this Babel, for here they lost their national character and without becoming Western, became just: *pesti*'.⁸⁶ This mindset dictated that the nation would now impose its will on the city, to punish it for its sins. Yet once again, Budapest absorbed and even attracted those who damned it, in great numbers; and throughout the 1920s and 1930s the political autonomy of the city was curtailed by central government measures.⁸⁷ The state no longer promoted the city as its agent, yet in the 1930s, criticism of the government still associated corruption and power with the city.

The *népi-urbánus vita*, the public dispute between Populist writers and their critics, usually referred to in English as the Urbanists,⁸⁸ revived and synthesised a

⁸⁵ 'Műveltsége cinikus gőgnél nem volt egyéb, elevensége nem más, mint erkölcstelenség, művészete csak nagyhangú reklám.' Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁶ 'A magyar szellem, a szív, a hang, a szem csak addig volt magyar, amíg fel nem került ebbe a Babelbe, mert itt elveszítette nemzeti jellegét, anélkül, hogy nyugatvá vált volna - csak pesti lett.' Ibid., p. 68. Pest-Buda had been referred to as a Babel as early as 1834 in *Auróra*. See Sánta, "*Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa*", p. 24. Babylonian metaphors were also popular. The Romanian Fascist poet and contemporary of Ady, Octavian Goga, writing on the 'judaised' city with its modern 'Ahasverus-ism' and urbanised literature, asked 'What kind of interest or understanding these people can have for the typical Hungarian life, from which they are absolutely alien and which they can never know sitting in their improvised Babylon?' Goga, 'Doua suflete; doua literaturi' in *Luceafarul*, 1913, cited in Paraianu, *Envisioning the City*, p. 137. Here, 'Babylon' means Paris.

⁸⁷ See Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *A budapesti liberális ellenzék 1919-1944* (The Budapest Liberal Opposition 1919-1944), *Értekezések a történeti tudományok köréből új sorozat* 59, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1972.

⁸⁸ See Gyula Borbándi's pro-Populist monograph, *A magyar népi mozgalom. A harmadik reformnemzedék*, New York, Püski, 1983. Anthologies of Populist writers include: Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds), *The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930-1956*, London, Peter Owen, 1963; and Rózsa Varga and Sándor Patyi (eds), *A népi írók bibliográfiája. Művek, irodalom, mozgalom 1920-1960*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1962. A selection of articles from the 1930s dispute is provided in Péter Sz. Nagy (ed.), *A népi-urbánus vita dokumentumai 1932-1947*, Budapest, Rakéta,

number of existing reformist urban narratives. László Németh, the novelist and chief ideologue of the ‘Third Way’ strand to Populism, used typically cryptic language when arguing that the political structure of society should be reorganised so that the ‘spine’ should once again be at the centre of the body, and a leading stratum should come to power which understood the relation of the body and its position.⁸⁹ The dispute located the city’s ethnic composition and, by extension, character, within broader debates about ‘organic’ versus ‘inorganic’ societies, backwardness, and race. As I shall argue further in chapter four, the dream of establishing a *Volksgemeinschaft* in Hungary resulted in an impossible fantasy about the city: in 1938, Németh had urged that Budapest be subject to a new *honfoglalás*,⁹⁰ in other words an influx of peasants, which would make the city Hungarian in a few generations.⁹¹ Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the poor had streamed into the city from the countryside, and became the industrial proletariat (as well as domestics). Other Populists lamented that Budapest was home to ‘the lackey-playwright, the author of pulp fiction, the stock exchange gambler, the hack living off economic blackmail and his cousin who lives off lump sum payments, the bog-journalist, the publisher of trash, the producer, the film writer, the theatre producer whom language fails us to describe, the manager of chorus-girls, indeed, the girl-trafficker...’.⁹² One is pleasantly reminded of the *Völkischer Beobachter*’s declamation of Berlin in 1929 as “‘the melting-pot of all evil ... of prostitution, bars, illness, movies, Marxism, Jews, strippers, Negro dances, and all the disgusting

1990. For criticism of the Populists, see: Éva Lakatos (ed.), *A Toll (1929-1938)*, Budapest, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1977; and Pál Ignóty, *Vissza az értelemhez* (Return to Sense), ed. András Bozóki, Budapest, Új Mandátum, 1997.

⁸⁹ ‘Át kell építeni társadalmunk hatalmi strukturáját, hogy a gerinc megint a test középvonalába kerüljön, s olyan vezérlő réteget kell uralomra juttatnunk, melynek tudomása van a testről és helyzetéről’. László Németh, speaking at the National Radical Party conference in 1934, cited in Lajos Hatvany, ‘A szellem különítményesei’, *Újság*, 27 March 1934, reprinted in Nagy (ed.), *Dokumentumai*, pp. 94-105 (p. 96).

⁹⁰ This word refers to the original ninth-century conquest of the Danube Basin by the proto-Magyars.

⁹¹ László Németh, ‘Budapest meghódítása’ (The Conquest of Budapest), *Kalangya*, 4, 1938, reprinted in László Németh, *Életmű szilánkokban*, vol. 1, Budapest, Magvető, 1989, pp. 561-65. Notwithstanding the vast array of collected works by Németh, this essay was not reprinted before 1989.

⁹² ‘A lakáj-drámaíró, a limonádé szerző, a tőzsdés, a közgazdasági zsarolásból élő “zúghírlapíró”, s unokatestvére, aki a közgazdasági pauszálékból él, a posvány-zsurnalista, a ponyvakiadó, a producer, a film író, a színházi vállalkozó, akire már nincs is jelző, a görli menedzser, sőt a leánykereskedő ...’ Gyula Illyés, *Magarok. Naplójegyzetek*, Budapest, 1939 first published in *Nyugat*, May 1938, cited in Tamás Ungvári, *Ahasverus és Shylock. A ‘zsidókérdés’ Magyarországon*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1999, p. 79.

offspring of so-called “modern art”; it is the most infertile city in the world”⁹³ The point is that the desire to cleanse and purge the city of unclean elements, is self-defeating. Cities exist because they are communities of large numbers of different people, yet the fantasy of a city somehow populated entirely by unspoiled specimens of the *Volk* never failed to grip the interwar central European imagination.

One should not imagine that Hungarian urban narratives were in any way unique: far from it. Since cities have existed they have symbolised plurality and functioned as a metaphoric and moral constant in literature, denoting man’s relationship with the man-made environment.⁹⁴ Literary portrayals of the city have always had implications that reach far beyond mere descriptions of its physical, temporal and social characteristics.

No city can clearly be seen yet most cities delight the eye with their marketplace variety, labyrinthine streets, and surprising changeability. Again and again in the history of modern thought, cities have been a challenge to the clarity of vision: the details, in themselves decipherable, do not come together to make a full picture. In the first place, the city has always been characterised as a Babel of contesting voices and intentions. This social and political diversity has a crucial epistemological aspect, in that the incompleteness of civic rule is accompanied by the instability of narrative authority. [...] At the same time, however, the metropolis doubles as the capital, which enforces regimentation and discipline in the name of imperial mastery and economic efficiency. None the less, the metropolis and the capital coexist in the same urban place. Cities remain fascinating to this day precisely because they put into question delusions of order and fantasies of disorder alike and because they indicate the extent to which aesthetic preferences for either are ideological fallacies. The city frustrates both the dictator and the rag-picker.⁹⁵

It was never suggested, however, that Budapest be a provincial backwater. The city may have been ‘readily damned, and urban society often seemed to be living in a state of fundamental repentance’,⁹⁶ but even in the most rabid expressions of

⁹³ Cited in Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 155.

⁹⁴ For pre-industrial ideas on cities see, for instance: Aristotle, *Politics* (written 350 BCE), trans. Ernest Baker, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998; the third Satire (written c. 118 CE) on Rome’s internationalism in Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, trans. Peter Green, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1998; and St. Augustine, *City of God* (written 413-27 CE), trans. Henry Bettenson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984.

⁹⁵ Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁶ Stein Rokkan cited in Paul Claval, ‘Reflections on the Cultural Geography of the European City’ in John Agnew, John Mercer and David Sopher (eds), *The City in Cultural Context*, Winchester MA, Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 31-49 (p. 43).

antipathy towards the Hungarian capital, there always remained a seed of hope that the Babylonian city could yet one day be redeemed.⁹⁷ The question was: to what extent a big city could or might be Hungarian. It is here that my ideas diverge from much of the received wisdom in Hungarian historiography and literary criticism. While the rural/urban opposition should not be denied its prominent place among Hungarian national discourses, I propose that anti-urbanism, for want of a better phrase is, paradoxically, a reformist, pro-city set of ideas, the aim of which is the hungarianisation of Budapest. Here, and this trope gathered strength in the interwar period culminating in the anti-Jewish laws of 1938/9, 'Hungarian' means *judenrein*. Steven Beller writes with reference to Vienna, although it also holds true for Budapest, that if the assimilation of Jews 'created *Großstadtjuden*, clumsily translated as "big-city Jews", this process of Jewish assimilation and integration also had a very large part to play in making Vienna [and Budapest] into a *Großstadt*'.⁹⁸ At its simplest, the equation informing Hungarian anti-Budapest sentiment is as follows: the city equals modernity equals Jews. The association of Budapest with Jews was popular throughout turn-of-the-century central Europe. Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910, is credited with the introduction of the word *Judapest* into popular parlance throughout the Dual Monarchy. And it is an Austrian novel, Hugo Bettauer's *Die Stadt ohne Juden: Ein Roman von Übermorgen* (1922)⁹⁹ that best summarises the quixotic desire to make the city *judenrein* in the national interest. In *Die Stadt ohne Juden*, an anti-Jewish Law that enjoys unanimous public support rids Vienna and the entire country of Jews overnight, with moral and financial support from other 'Christian' nations of the world. The law's architect, the

⁹⁷ Biblical imagery used in representations of cities is referred to in Preston and Simpson-Housely, *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon and The New Jerusalem*. Unfortunately, neither editors nor contributors expand on this much beyond the title.

⁹⁸ Steven Beller, 'Big-city Jews: Jewish Big City – The Dialectics of Jewish Assimilation in Vienna c. 1900' in Malcolm Gee, Tim Kirk and Jill Steward (eds), *The City in Central Europe: Culture and Society from 1800 to the Present*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, pp. 145-58 (p. 146).

⁹⁹ Hugo Bettauer, *The City Without Jews: A Novel of Our Time*, trans. Salomea Neumark Brainin, New York, Bloch, 1926. Bettauer was shot dead in his offices in March 1925 by a young man of a 'Nordic' political persuasion, who 'declared himself content with his deed, as he had resolved to save German *Kultur* from degeneration, and believed that Bettauer was a menace to this *Kultur*'. Translator's Introduction in *Ibid.*, pp. v-viii (p. vi). Steven Beller notes that Bettauer's view on the cultural role of Jews was shared by his contemporaries: Jakob Wassermann, Paul Engelmann, Stefan Zweig, Julius Braunthal, Käthe Leichter and Ernst Lothar. Zweig wrote that 'whoever wished to put through something in Vienna, or came to Vienna as a guest from abroad and sought appreciation as well as an audience, was dependent on the Jewish bourgeoisie'. Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 7.

Chancellor Dr Karl Schwertfeger, is hailed as the liberator of Austria: now the Austrian economy, its politics, media and culture are once again in ‘Christian’ hands. Immediately thereafter, the currency collapses, coffee houses close and theatres empty, Alpine hats and woollen tights replace *haute couture*; politicians have nobody left to scapegoat; unemployment levels soar, and Austria becomes the laughing stock of Europe. Public opinion turns against the government and the hero of the novel, a young Jewish painter Leo Strakosch, who has disguised himself as a French dandy, agitates for and ultimately engineers the repeal of the law. Schwertfeger commits suicide, Strakosch gets the girl, and is welcomed as the first Jew to return to Vienna by the Mayor with the following words: “‘My beloved Jew!’”.¹⁰⁰

The irony is not so much that Vienna was emptied of Jews almost twenty years after the book’s publication, or, that in Bettauer’s fantasy, the Austrians came to their senses and re-admitted the Jews to rescue them from their self-imposed provincial hell. It is in the admission that, until the Second World War, in central Europe, a modern city without Jews was something of an oxymoron. In Austria-Hungary, Jews were regarded (and often regarded themselves) as a yeast; an alien, *wirtschaftlich* catalyst that fermented modernity in this otherwise fallow land peopled by inept, dreamy natives.¹⁰¹ Urban narratives, then, were often discussions of the ‘Jewish Question’ by other means. But I do not wish to reinforce national stereotypes, or argue that anti-urbanism is merely antisemitism, however tempting this might initially be. The works of Budapest literature I discuss were themselves the products of assimilation; not only of Jews into Hungarian national culture, but also of individuals into larger modern and urban collectives. The city offered numerous opportunities for reinvention of the self, be it immersion in the crowd and

¹⁰⁰ Bettauer, *The City Without Jews*, p. 189.

¹⁰¹ For examples of the notion that commerce and innovation are alien to the Hungarian national character, see Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék. Egy hanyatló kör története*, Budapest, Élet, 1920; Péter Ágoston, *A jövő kérdései*, 2 vols., Nagyvárad, Nagyvárad Társadalomtudományi Társaság, 1916-17; Gyula Szekfű (ed.), *Mi a magyar?*, Budapest, Magyar Szemle, 1939; Péter Veres, *Mit ér az ember, ha magyar? Levelek egy parasztfűhöz*, Budapest, Magyar Élet, 1946; István Nemeskürty, *Mi magyarok. A magyar történelem az igaz krónika rendje szerint*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1993. Péter Hanák provides an illustrative anecdote: ‘In 1900 one of the Károly counts, a real *grand seigneur*, invited the German consul-general in Budapest to his home. At the end of the visit the guest asked how it was that no one in the family or household played music. Why should they? enquired the count, that was what the Gypsies were for. “As we keep the Gypsies to play music for us, since we are too lazy to do it ourselves, so we keep the Jews to do the work for us”’. Hanák, ‘The Image of Germans and Jews in the Hungarian Mirror of the Nineteenth Century’ in Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, pp. 44-62 (p. 53).

disappearance, or the re-modelling of oneself as a dandy, cosmopolite, or nationalist demagogue. This last possibility is perhaps the most neglected: Budapest was, without doubt, the centre of learning, publishing, and dissemination of ideas. The young firebrand who wished to become a national poet, save his country and hungarianise his capital city had to rely on Budapest to do so. I am more interested in the fluid identities and processes of becoming that these works portray, than in supposedly immutable categories of Jew, non-Jew, cosmopolitan, nationalist, and so on.

Attempts to make the city knowable, to condense the numerous lives, stories and *topoi* into a literary narrative, bore a striking similarity to constructions of the image of 'the Jew'. Or, at the very least, there is a correspondence between the ambivalence of the abstract image (the image of 'the Jew', or the word-city), and empirical reality, although the ambivalence is not reducible to what the 'empirical' Jew or city does or did.¹⁰² Both city and Jew were believed to be saboteurs of correct gender roles, tradition, morality, and nature. In his essay 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern', Zygmunt Bauman suggests that antisemitism should be classified as a proteophobia, rather than a heterophobia, for the Jew is 'ambivalence incarnate':

[T]he proper generic phenomenon of which the resentfulness of the Jews is a part is *proteophobia*, not *heterophobia*; the apprehension and vexation related not to something or someone disquieting through otherness and unfamiliarity, but to something or someone that does not fit the structure of the orderly world, does not fall easily into any of the established categories, emits therefore contradictory signals as to the proper conduct – and in the result blurs the borderlines which ought to be kept watertight and undermines the reassuringly monotonous, repetitive and predictable nature of the life-world [...] [T]here is a certain correspondence, a certain affinity between the endemic under-determination, under-definition of protean phenomena, and the categorical elusiveness of the Jews who tend to sit astride all the usual divides and elide all the criteria normally deployed to draw them.¹⁰³

This notion of proteophobia may help to explain why the Jew was identified with so many diverse phenomena. Leo Pinsker wrote in 1882: 'For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives an alien and a vagrant; for the poor and exploited he is well-heeled; for patriots a man without a country; for all classes, a hated

¹⁰² See Zygmunt Bauman, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern' in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds), *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 143-156 (p. 151).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

competitor.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Jews were believed to be a simultaneously primitive, dirty people incapable of creating true art, and also excessively cerebral and over-cultured. As the infinitely flexible signifier of disorder, the Jew was a 'withdrawn, very conservative and even "invariable" type of man, but from another viewpoint he [was also] a very accommodating, pliant, variant element in society, receptive to everything new'.¹⁰⁵

The superficiality, greed, and fetish for gimmicks attributed to the Jews surfaced as characteristics of the big city in Hungarian urban narratives with monotonous regularity. However, antisemitism, or a more general proteophobia, was only one element in the construction of Budapest as *Judapest*, or the sinful city. Modern Hungary required a capital city, and everything that entails, which was also satisfactorily familiar, even provincial. This was not unique to the Hungarians.¹⁰⁶ The combined impact of rapid urbanisation, migrations, the publishing boom, and literary and political revolutions, meant that any verbal representation of the city was nigh irreconcilable with any grand homogenising narrative. It is in the failure of critiques of the city that my interest lies: the attempt to make sense of the city, and to understand it as a possible form of community, is what one is left with after reading

¹⁰⁴ 'Für den Lebenden ist der Jude ein toter Mann, für die Einheimischen ein Fremder und ein Landstreicher, für Vermögende ein Bettler, für die Armen und Ausgebeuteten ein Millionär, für Patrioten ein Mann ohne Land und für sämtliche Klassen ein verhaßte Konkurrent'. Leo Pinsker cited in George L. Mosse, *Die Geschichte des Rassismus in Europa*, Frankfurt/Main, Fischer, 1990, p. 222.

¹⁰⁵ Péter Hanák, 'The Image of the Germans and the Jews in the Hungarian Mirror of the Nineteenth Century' in Hanák, pp. 55-6. Linda Nochlin provides gendered variations on the list of familiar stereotypes: 'Jews are too smart and inherently incapable of genius; Jewish women are natural wantons and asexual or frigid; Jews underhandedly control the international banking community and yet pollute the cities with their fetid, crime-ridden slums; Jews are over-intellectual but over-emotional, hyper-rational but superstitious.' Nochlin, 'Introduction. Starting with the Self: Jewish Identity and its Representation' in Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1995, pp. 7-19 (p. 7).

¹⁰⁶ Svetoslav Bombík argues that Bratislava had to be the Slovak capital, paradoxically because of its un-Slovak nature: 'The philosophy of Slovak statehood, based on the principle of ethnic exclusivity [...] has an attitude towards Bratislava. Of all the nations whose fate has in some way or other been bound up with Bratislava, it is the Slovaks who have made this "provincial" city into the capital city of a state; at the same time this act is linked to the demand for its slovakisation. On the one hand, the status of capital city has no doubt raised the importance of Bratislava and the life of the city has gained a range of new aspects. On the other hand, Bratislava, old central European Bratislava, has paid a high price for its slovakisation: the demolition of the old city, the removal of its original inhabitants, its chaotic growth. We might ask whether by these means the capital city has not lost some of its metropolitan character, if it has not simply become more provincial?' Svetoslav Bombík, 'Bratislava a naša štátnosť: "Slovakizovať" Bratislavu, či "stredoeuropeizovať" Slovensko?' ('Bratislava and Our Statehood: Whether to "slovakise" Bratislava or to "central-Europeanise" Slovakia?') in *Bližšie k Európe: štúdie a články* (Closer to Europe: Essays and Articles), Bratislava, Slovenská nadácia pre európske štúdie, 1995, pp. 88-90 (89). Translation kindly provided by Tim Beasley-Murray.

diatribes against and love letters to the Hungarian capital. I do not, however, look only at disapproving portrayals of the city. I include unapologetic ‘big-city’ writers whose works are nevertheless informed by nostalgia for a smaller, kinder city, and rabid antisemites who dream of a Budapest moulded in the image of the genteel non-Jewish middle class, not the peasantry. My chapters are arranged thematically, and in each chapter I discuss three or four literary works as examples. It is not my intention to trace one trope over the period studied here in each chapter – that would be too large a task; but rather, to provide close readings of novels, short stories and autobiographies and discuss ways in which the authors created word-cities. This is not to say that a work discussed in the chapter on gender could not also be read as a commentary on assimilation; indeed, the themes reappear throughout. In each chapter, with the exception of Chapter 1, I discuss the works in chronological order.

Chapter Outlines

The first chapter examines literary portrayals of arrival in and acculturation to the city. A notion of the process of becoming, or even of assimilation in its broadest sense, was a universal theme of *fin-de-siècle* art. Profound social upheavals and migrations heightened an awareness of the passage of time, and the three novels I discuss attempt to condense the hectic lifespan of the protagonist into one simple, moral tale. They are didactic, but also reveal the authors’ (sometimes unintended) understanding of processes of assimilation. The first is an Aesopic short novel by the recluse Géza Gárdonyi (1863-1922), portraying the last days of an old man who sells his land and is uprooted to the unfamiliar city where he lives with his daughter and her family, and where he withers and dies. The second is Ferenc Molnár’s (1878-1952) novel which presents the parallel lives of a converted Jew who marries an American millionairess, and an unemployed dock worker from Trieste who co-habits with a masochistic washerwoman. Last is a novel in drama form by the prominent novelist, playwright and literary critic Ferenc Herczeg (1863-1954), and is a tale of two races. Here, the Jewish bourgeoisie is one of Herczeg’s targets, as well as the non-Jewish bright young things who attempt to curry favour with them. All three works deal with the masks that individuals donned in order to gain acceptance, and

the tensions encountered while trying to be oneself in the metropolis. They all posit that more often than not, pretending to be someone else was the best option for survival. It is the success or failure in the process of becoming that I focus on.

In the second chapter, I discuss a number of ‘guides’ through the city, not tourist information brochures, but literary excursions through the space and time of Budapest. Adolf Ágai (1836-1916), writing under the pseudonym Porzó, provides the first such work: it charts the parallel transformation of Pest-Buda from a German-speaking town into a Hungarian city, and his own assimilation from German-speaking Jew to larger-than-life Hungarian. Antal Szerb’s (1901-45) guide to Budapest was written for Martians. He points out to the Martian the various faces of the city, all the way making plain to the visitor from outer space things that would have perplexed many a Populist in the mid-1930s. The last work is more of a detailed zoological portrait by Lajos Nagy (1883-1954), which presents a month in the life of one coffee house. These works proffer the gamut of decadent urban stereotypes, but locate not only the character, but also the Hungarian-ness of the city in its heterogeneity.

The relations between men, women and morality is the focus of the third chapter. The first novel is by Tamás Kóbor (1867-1942), and is the story of a young working-class woman’s struggle to keep up appearances as the mistress of a prominent politician. The second is by Kálmán Harsányi (1876-1929), a work portraying one man’s struggle to create a utopia in the city and the role women play in intellectual circles. Fantasies of Rome and a descent into mental illness are used to illustrate the dangers cosmopolitanism, materialism and feminism pose for the psyche. Emma Ritoók’s (1868-1945) semi-autobiographical novel describes the gender and class politics of György Lukács and friends in the Sunday Circle, before concluding with a feminist antisemitic interpretation of the 1919 revolution. The final work is by Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942), and offers an insight into an unhappy middle-class marriage, male fantasies of class and sex, and the competition between different generations for the most precious commodity: women. These works deal with disruptions to traditional morality, and pursue the search for personal happiness in the anomic city, despite social obstacles.

The final chapter concerns the depiction of the revolutions of 1918 and 1919. Here, I argue that the semantic radicalisation which followed the revolutions was

realised in a number of contradictory ways. I discuss three works by authors not usually mentioned in the same sentence: Dezső Szabó (1879-1945), Cécile Tormay (1876-1937) and Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936). Szabó's work was the most influential novel of the interwar period, and presents a blueprint for revival of the Hungarian race: retreat to the countryside and procreation. However, the sinful city plays a central role in the realisation of this rural utopia. Tormay provides a 'diary' of the two revolutions, as seen by an exemplary patriotic woman. Not only was the racist material in the text excessive even for its time, but it also provides an intriguing argument based on the conception that the city had been crucified in the revolutions, and resurrected by its guardians, the radical right-wing middle class. Finally, Kosztolányi's novel explores the middle class's attempt to restore a domestic sense of order following the revolutions, and again posits the city as the protagonist of Hungarian history.

Chapter One

Acculturation to the City

Introduction

I have outlined in the introduction how Budapest's rapid late nineteenth-century expansion transformed literary activity and perceptions of the city. A discrete sense of novelty pervades portrayals of arrival in the booming cosmopolis: for many young men,¹ discovery of the big city complemented the discovery of literature. In other words, the process of becoming a cosmopolite duplicated that of becoming a writer: this was a double metamorphosis.

Within a single lifespan a rural community might be transformed into an industrial conurbation. The impact on human sensibility was all the greater because so many city-dwellers were not born in the metropolis, but were migrants from more traditional communities. The poet who sought to come to terms with the city was often a young man from the country.²

In this chapter I shall look at three turn-of-the-century novels of acculturation to the city - the process of becoming *pesti*. They are, in chronological order: Ferenc Molnár's *Az éhes város* (The Hungry City, 1901); Ferenc Herczeg's *Andor és András* (Andor and András, 1903); and Géza Gárdonyi's *Az öreg tekintetes* (The Old Gentleman, 1905). My argument is that these novels dispense with the notion of free will, and attempt to establish a one-way top-down relationship between city and recent arrival and/or one who is trying to become *pesti*. Here, Budapest is portrayed as the class structure writ large. The criticisms and paradoxes of the city and its representation in these novels were to undergo change over time, and were radicalised at the end of the Great War. Each novel was chosen to provide an example of realist fiction at the turn of the century.

¹ I am not aware of a novel written by a woman about a woman's arrival in the city, although plenty of male authors wrote stories of young girls becoming domestics or actresses. Margit Kaffka's semi-autobiographical novel, *Állomások* (Stations, 1917), which depicts a divorcee's voyage of (self-)discovery in liberal literary circles, will not be discussed because it focuses more on the heroine renegotiating her status as an independent woman, within a small, closed circle of people. Emma Ritoók's *A szellem kalandorai* (Adventurers of the Spirit, 1921), which addresses similar matters, is discussed in chapter 3.

² Edward Timms, 'Introduction: Unreal City – Themes and Variations', in Timms and Kelley (eds), *Unreal City*, pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

I shall examine the notion of process in portrayals of acculturation to the city, and the opportunities apparently provided by the city for reinvention and recreation of the self. These novels are structured by the success or failure of the protagonists' attempts at self-reinvention, and all three works focus on the development of a conflict between public persona and inner strife as an integral experience of acculturation. Images of the newcomer (*jövevény*) are laden with pathos in the novels. One is clearly meant to draw a moral lesson from the trials and tribulations of becoming *pesti*, and the authors' presentation and condensation of broad social upheavals into the story of one protagonist. Processes of change are reliably subjected to a rigorous moral schema and the protagonist's fate is explained away as a foregone conclusion.

These novels reveal one more outcome of the acculturation process. Budapest proves to be a particularly unforgiving environment for the eager protagonists. The city imprisons its inhabitants in a rigid system of class hierarchy and everything is permeated by the stench of snobbery and brutal one-up manship. This is, in effect, another dimension of rapid social change and tension between the old and the new. The paradox for the newcomer is that liberation from one's earlier self (place of birth, family background, denomination and so on) may only be attained by unquestioning conformity and mimicry of those perched one rung above on the social ladder. Self-reinvention, then, a supposed reward for the aspirant cosmopolite, demands that one successfully dupe others into believing that one is whoever one is required to be. In the gay city, one merely needs to don a mask to gain acceptance and survive.³ The existential crisis comes about when the individual fails to convince himself, for these are novels of male metamorphosis, that he remains nothing but a disillusioned, hollow shell of his earlier self. In this chapter, I do not discuss the novels in chronological order. I shall begin with the two more unsubtle, didactic novels, Gárdonyi's *Az öreg tekintetes* and Molnár's *Az éhes város*, and conclude with the more ambiguous portrayal of cosmopolitan role-play, *Andor és András* by Herczeg.

³ One need look no further than William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) and to the alluring and ruthless figure of Becky Sharp to find a prototype protagonist who, in order to marry and therefore survive, presents herself as whoever those around her (and with a controlling hand in her fate) require her to be.

Gárdonyi's City of Wooden People

Géza Gárdonyi (1863-1922) trained as a teacher in his hometown, Eger, and moved to Budapest in 1891, two years after the publication of his first short stories. He wrote for *Magyar Hirlap*, where he made friends with Zoltán Ambrus (1861-1922) and Sándor Bródy (1863-1924), contributed to the oppositional satirical paper *Mátyás Diák* (Matthias the Student), and made his name with the *Göre Gábor* parodies of a village boor.⁴ Gárdonyi left the capital after a mere six years, and returned to Eger where he wrote what would become his best-known works, and isolating himself from public life. By 1900 he was established as one of the most popular writers in Hungary. In his later years, Gárdonyi was increasingly drawn towards mysticism, irrationalism and the thinking of Schopenhauer, and he came to regret his earlier mockery of a stock countryside buffoon character. His historical novels reveal a preoccupation with the symbolism of death and dreams, but he certainly cannot be counted among those writers inspired by psychoanalysis. Best remembered for his works for children, Gárdonyi was not a particularly experimental or challenging writer in terms of theme or style; neither was he much interested by the literary trends of the day, either in Hungary or abroad.

Written eight years after Gárdonyi left the capital, *Az öreg tekintetes*⁵ is the fable of Károly Csurgó, an old man who moves from an unnamed village to reside in Budapest with his daughter's family for the final year of his life. What is remarkable about this short novel is that one learns nothing of the characters' inner lives: descriptions of physique and deportment are intended to suffice as insights into their essential nature. Domestic interiors, courtyards, and the insides of a bar, are sketched only to emphasise that surroundings dictate behaviour. Green velvet lampshades demand the pretence of polite conversation; squalid ground-floor flats enclose sufferance of misery; the street creates the rush of anonymous individuals.

⁴ Géza Gárdonyi, *Göre Gábor úr könyve*, Budapest, Singer & Wolfner, 1896; and *A pesti úr*, Budapest, Singer & Wolfner, 1900. See Buzinkay, *Mokány Berczi és Spitzig Iczig, Göre Gábor meg a többiek*. *Görbe* means curved or crooked, and these qualities may have been alluded to in the name *Göre*. *Göre* is a rotund and corrupt provincial magistrate.

⁵ Géza Gárdonyi, *Az öreg tekintetes* (1905), Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1978.

The old man sticks out like a sore thumb in this cruel world. His appearance, dress and therefore qualities, do not belong in the city. Csurgó does, however, conform to the rule of environmental determinism set forth in the novel: he was born and will die a simple, proud man of the soil. But because he has been uprooted from his natural environment and will die in the city, his death must be unnatural.

The only two substantial character descriptions in the novel are of Csurgó and Imre Tardy, Csurgó's son-in-law. Csurgó has no ideas and can barely boast a personality, rather a collection of simple reactions, instincts, and *bodenständig* common sense. He attends the welcome supper held in his honour dressed in traditional Sunday best, his heavy boots creaking noisily and echoing the village with every step around the ostentatious flat on the Nagykörút.⁶ Csurgó naturally sports an impressive waxed moustache and beard, and the fact that his hands are large and brown (though not calloused like a peasant's), is meant to show that a heavy hunting rifle was never out of his grasp in his youth.⁷ He cannot but move at his slow countryside pace through the fast city: even his pipe-smoking indicates an excess of time:

For the pipe was nowadays an unknown entity in the capital. One needs time to smoke a pipe, and the city man has everything except time. The city man is always in a hurry. His life is one big commotion. Pipe-smoking is only for the man who has time to fill it, tamp it down and luxuriate in its fragrant smoke. And how they smiled at him then! The old man had appeared amongst them like something from another world; an ancient Hungarian who had stepped out of the picture frame and sat down amongst the living, smoking his pipe.⁸

Csurgó insists on smoking in the courtyard, an activity forbidden in the house, he addresses everyone with over-familiar greetings, and is the source of much embarrassment to his daughter Gizella, her family and pretentious acquaintances.

⁶ Grand Boulevard, the inner ring road.

⁷ 'A keze is falusias volt: nagy és barna, ha nem is olyan kerges, mint a parasztké; látszott rajta, hogy fiatal korában sohasem hiányzott belőle a nehéz vadászpuska'. Ibid., p. 13. I shall discuss Dezső Szabó's repetition of a similar distinction between those with beautiful glowing brown skin, and those with sickly yellow skin, in the final chapter on the revolutions of 1918/19.

⁸ 'Mert a pipa ismeretlen valami már a fővárosban. A pipázásra idő kell, s a fővárosi embernek mindene van, csek ideje nincsen. A fővárosi ember mindig siet. Lótás-futás az élete. A pipa csak annak való, aki ráér tömőgetni, piszkálgatni, illatos füstjében gyönyörködni. De hát miért mosolyogták meg! Mert az öregúr úgy jelen meg köztük, mint egy ismeretlen világ képviselője; egy ómagyar, aki kilép a képrámból, s leül az élők közé pipázni'. Gárdonyi, *Az öreg tekintetes*, p. 33.

Gizella's husband, Dr Tardy, is the anti-Csurgó figure. A vain and cold man, he is a compulsive gambler and a liar.

When [Tardy] laughed, it was as if he were coughing, and when he coughed, it was as if he were laughing. The waves of inner feelings never once appeared on his stony face. And when he did laugh, only his mouth laughed, not his eyes. The other residents had already grown used to him. He was always like this, even when he was vexed. His fury appeared just as false as his laugh. Wooden people are like this. When they cut their finger, we are amazed that they bleed.⁹

Földi, a supper guest and father of Tardy's school friend, confirms that in Budapest, 'the face is just ornamental, like a shop sign. In the countryside, the soul resides right there on people's faces'.¹⁰ By way of illustration, Csurgó is the dogged yet noble man from the past, one of a disappearing breed who calls a spade a spade. He refuses to believe that anyone who speaks German, for example, a Jew, might not be German. Nothing much is left to the imagination: characters are bound to follow their fates; motivation or reflection are absent; no one (including the reader) learns anything new. Without his land and concomitant freedom, Csurgó cannot survive in the urban environment which denies not only him, but all people, the fundamentals of life: morality, patriarchal authority and the happy symbiosis of man with Nature. City and countryside necessarily collide, and Csurgó's unhappy death is a foregone conclusion.¹¹

The story opens with Gárdonyi presenting the class hierarchy of Budapest in particularly stark relief. While the family sit down to supper in Csurgó's honour,

⁹ 'Mikor nevetett, olyan volt, mintha köhögne, és amikor köhögött, olyan volt, mintha nevetne. Merev arcán nem jelentek meg soha a belső érzések hullámai. Ha nevetett is, csak a szája nevetett, a szeme nem. A házbéliek már megszokták. Ilyen volt ő, ha bosszankodott is. A dühe épp oly nem igazinak látszott, mint a nevetése. A faemberek ilyenek. Ha az újját megvágja az ilyen ember, csodálkozunk, hogy vérzik'. Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰ 'A fővárosban az arc csak fejdísz, cégtábla. Vidéken ott ül a lélek az emberek arcán'. Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹ Lőrinc Szabó summoned up similar imagery in his 1923 poem 'Város' (City). The city consists of endless rows of proud and mighty palaces in the moonlight. The newcomer, fresh from God's field, stumbles alone through these hills and hearts of stone and, ultimately, can only close his eyes: 'Házak, paloták, esti fény./ Isten mezejéről jövök én./ Házak, paloták, palotasorok./ szépek, büszkék, hatalmasok./ Házak, paloták, kövek, kövek —/ Hol hajtom le a fejemet?/ Házak, paloták, éji fény./ Társtalan csavarog a jövevény./ Házak, paloták, palotasorok./ mint kő-hegyláncok, olyanok./ Kő-hegyláncokban kő-szívek —/ Mit is vártam én töletek?/ Házak, paloták, hajnali fény./ Lehunyja szemét a jövevény'. Lőrinc Szabó, 'Város' from the autobiographical cycle 'Tücsökzene', in *Szabó Lőrinc összegyűjtött művei*, Budapest, Magvető, 1960, p. 45.

one of Tardy's poor female patients lurks in the hall, refusing to leave until she is seen. Tardy attempts to send her away with his usual half-hearted advice, claiming that drinking milk will cure stomach cancer. Csurgó goes out to see her, advises her to eat fried marrow, and asks her to come back and see him when she is better, insisting all the while that she refrain from addressing him as 'your lordship'. The woman remains nameless throughout, despite the fact that her family history and plight are described in detail. She is a widow who lives around the corner on Práter Street with her daughter Zsuzsika and the objectionable lodger she took in after the death of her husband. When Csurgó goes to visit the sick woman, he learns that the cobbler next door has refused to fix the arrogant lodger's shoes on the grounds that he 'belongs to that race which tortured and killed my Lord'.¹² The old man wonders what the point is in avenging a crime committed two thousand years ago. Completely unaware of the social mores and codes of Budapest life (for instance, one journalist is worth half a baron as a dinner guest) Csurgó is treated like a child by his family and especially by Gizella, who is ashamed that her father is so village-like (*falusias*), simple and rustic.

The tempo of the novel is initially dictated by the occurrence of public events in private space: dinner parties in the Tardy home. At the second dinner party, Csurgó remarks that life in the city is like being abroad, what with all the foreign names of shops and so forth. Once again, he is forbidden to smoke his pipe. Its outdated, over-sweet stench pollutes the bourgeois domestic (read: artificial) environment. When the nameless widow dies, he declares that Tardy should not have forgotten her, to which Gizella replies that compassion is rare in the city. 'What is unusual? Compassion? I don't care if it is unusual! It might be unusual in the city, but I am not the city! I am just Károly Csurgó. The lady was my patient, so I shall bury her myself.'¹³ Right up until the closing passages, Csurgó retains his 'nature', stubbornly resisting Budapest pretensions, fashion and amorality. His attempt to exist in the city is doomed from the start: the city denies the individual a

¹² 'Azért – felelte a varga a fonal végét megnyálazva – hát azért, mert maga ahhoz a népfajhoz tartozik, amelyik az én uramat megkínózta, megölte'. Gárdonyi, *Az öreg tekintetes*, pp. 54-5.

¹³ 'Mi szokatlan? Az irgalmasság? Nem bánom én, ha szokatlan is! Ha a fővárosnak szokatlan, én nem vagyok főváros! Én csak Csurgó Károly vagyok. Az asszony az én betegem volt, hát én temetem el!' Ibid., p. 76.

true personality, even though one is led to suspect that personality might itself be one of those new-fangled, modern notions. One cannot be oneself, hence only the adoption of a mask or, here, ‘personality’, allows one to fight in the law-of-the-urban-jungle struggle for survival. The family eventually move Csurgó into an upstairs flat and slowly forget about him. He never speaks to Tardy again once he finds out that he gambled away the proceeds from the sale of his land in the village, which was sold to Rosenberg, the village publican.

The land: it was with great difficulty that he sold the ancestral land to Rosenberg. The thought that Rosenberg would sit in the armchair in the place of his father, that slovenly Mrs Rosenberg would go in and out of his mother’s kitchen, that the Rosenberg family would swarm through the corridor, the courtyard, the small garden – this thought was excruciating for him. No! He would rather live without the money.¹⁴

Csurgó ends up penniless, drinking brandy in his room. He attempts to complain to a complete stranger, who later cheats him, about the city: ‘What a din! The dust! The filth! The rubble! The crooks! The card games! In the village there is dust, but only on the coach tracks when a coach goes past; there are also crooks in the village, but they are locked up; there is also card playing, but only for kreutzers’.¹⁵ In the closing chapter, Csurgó grows corn in an old cigar box. Bees come into his room and he is delighted, but the residents are apoplectic at this final transgression of house rules. When Tardy is stung by the bees, Csurgó smiles, leaves, walks down to the Danube and throws himself in. His body was, according to the following day’s newspaper reports, identified by the cobbler of Práter Street.

¹⁴ ‘A földet, az ősi földet el tudta adni nagy nehezen Rosenbergnek, de az a gondolat, hogy Rosenberg oda fog ülni a karosszékbe, az ő apja helyébe, hogy a lompos Rosenbergné ott fog ki-bejárni a konyhán, ahol az ő anyja, hogy a Rosenberg családja ott fog nyüzsögni a folyosón, az udvaron, a kiskertben, ez a gondolat gyötrelmes volt neki. Nem! Inkább élni fog pénztelenül’. Ibid., p. 88. Again, one notices a parallel with Szabó’s *Az elsodort falu*, wherein Jews control the supply of alcohol and, therefore, intoxication. See Chapter 4.

¹⁵ ‘Micsoda lárma! Micsoda por! Micsoda szenny! Micsoda köhalmaz! Mennyi gazember! Mennyi kártyás! Hiszen elvégre falun is van por, de csak a kocsúton, amikor egy-egy kocsi fölveri; falun is van gazember, de azt becsukják; falun is kártyáznak, de ott csak krajcárba’. Gárdonyi, *Az öreg tekintetes*, p. 91.

Gárdonyi's oeuvre is one of naive, simplistic conservatism. His works were popular during his lifetime and remain so to this day, many of them regarded as suitable moral fables for the young. *Az öreg tekintetes* is no exception because it employed a number of popular tropes of its time. First, the city requires the individual to wear a mask in order to disguise him or herself, yet also to bury any remnants of personality and individuality in the interests of becoming lost in the crowd. Second, the much-heralded liberalism of urban life is a sham because people are intolerant, vain and selfish. Third, while things might appear to be the same as in the countryside (the existence of crooks, gambling, dirt and so on), nothing is in its proper place in the city. Glimmers of humanity are only revealed to Csurgó in his encounters with the lower orders, the nameless woman, the cobbler, bar-tenders and so on, those who have been excluded from the apparently liberating luxury of affluence. Gárdonyi's Budapest is populated by 'wooden people', the description originally applied to Tardy yet equally applicable to Csurgó's relatives, the residents of other flats in the house, and strangers on the street. The lesson that Csurgó fails to learn is that fear rules the lives of people in Budapest: one does not, indeed may not trust passers-by, or even close family. Yet for all the suspicion and reproof of the impersonal city, *Az öreg tekintetes* does not hint at a broader association between Budapest and national decay, a notion already in circulation in 1905.

The move to a city is 'a move into a new world in which [many people's] old ways of thinking, acting, being, are brought into question. To make that move successful, people need to redefine themselves, their interests, and their ways of acting. Nationalism can play an important part in this process of redefinition'.¹⁶ This redefinition of the self, the necessity of which Csurgó fails to comprehend, is portrayed by Gárdonyi as a matter of survival in the city, rather than as a more profound question of the individual's relation to the imagined national collective. Csurgó's existential defeat is to be understood on the basis of his class. Gárdonyi was not a radical whose world-view was skewed by resentment of the city or antisemitism; like Herczeg, he was a conservative for whom the perceived

¹⁶ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 22.

disappearance of old country ways and morality prompted regret, not thoughts of revolution. Budapest for Gárdonyi was a one-dimensional place, reflected in the wooden characters and wooden construction of this short novel.

The unforgiving city requires the incomer to blend with it and, ultimately, to disappear. This Csurgó eventually does in tragic fashion, having been denied his pipe, his money, and indeed his self by the materialist capital. His death is the only act he has any control over. Suicide is his only choice. His daughter, however, had made a successful transition to the city. Now entirely devoid of any original will or want, she has successfully assimilated to the city and become someone else: a no one. One cannot assume that this daughter of Csurgó and, by extension, of the village, was born a cold-hearted girl. *Az öreg tekintetes* refrains from making explicit the forces that drove Csurgó from the land and to his unhappy death in Budapest. Capitalism and greed had robbed his daughter of her self, and him of his daughter, natural surroundings and therefore life. But Gárdonyi had no need to remind the reader of the social context. The story simply presents types, not people. It is a moral statement against a necropolis, not a political statement against the cosmopolis. The Budapest of *Az öreg tekintetes* is an homogenous and homogenising place: Gárdonyi was as uneasy as Csurgó dealing with life in the big city. But it is not Budapest that kills the old man, but the sale of the land. He cannot pass on the land to his only child, because she has no use for it. The land loses its life-giving and life-sustaining properties when it becomes the object of a financial transaction. Accordingly, the land is sold to a representative of that people who have no natural link to the soil, and for whom land only has monetary value. Csurgó's ancestry has become a commodity, and this is the irrevocable act that demands the old man's death.

Molnár on The Hungry City

Ferenc Molnár, unlike Gárdonyi, was born and bred in Budapest. His first novel, *Az éhes város*,¹⁷ was written in his late teens. It is the work of an insider, and an angry young man. Although it portrays the city in greater detail and depth than *Az öreg tekintetes*, the novel none the less pursues the same imagery of a morally bankrupt city with only one source of power: money. Joseph Roth described the same in *Rechts und links* (1929): ‘A society’s values are determined by the index of its stock exchange’.¹⁸

Molnár was born Ferenc Neumann, son of the physicist Mór Neumann in Józsefváros in 1878. He attended a Protestant grammar school, and later studied law in Budapest and Geneva, although his preference for spending time in cafés to attending classes meant that he never graduated. He returned from Geneva in 1896 where he had begun writing short stories, changed his surname to Molnár, and moved into a hotel room on Margit Island to pursue a full-time bohemian life. Working first as a translator from French for *Budapest Napló* (Budapest Diary), he met Zoltán Ambrus and Sándor Bródy, who was later to become his mentor at *A Hét*, which serialised *Az éhes város* in 1900. He continued working as a journalist for these two papers and *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest Newspaper) while writing the plays with which he made his name both at home and abroad. Married three times, Molnár’s turbulent love affairs and occasional duels were themselves a source of gossip in Budapest and provided the inspiration for many of his early theatrical works.¹⁹ He worked as a war correspondent for *Az Est* (The Evening), at Max Reinhardt’s theatre in Vienna in 1925, and first visited New York in 1928 where he celebrated his fiftieth birthday on Broadway. Increasingly uneasy at the political climate in Hungary as the thirties wore on, he remained in Budapest until 1939

¹⁷ Molnár Ferenc, *Az éhes város* (1901), Budapest, Pesti Szalon, 1993.

¹⁸ Joseph Roth, *Right and Left*, trans. Michael Hofmann, London, Granta, 1999, p. 71.

¹⁹ Molnár dedicated his second play *Az ördög* to the actress Irén Varsányi. It was written as a challenge to her to leave her husband, the prominent industrialist Illés Szécsi. He was admitted into the Petőfi Society on the basis of this work, and served a two-week prison sentence for his duel with Szécsi in 1907. His star waned from around 1920, when his commercial success declined at home, throughout Europe, and in the United States. He was no longer the darling of the Budapest stage, and was referred to as ‘Chequespeare’ by some of his bitter (and no doubt envious) contemporaries.

when he moved first to Switzerland and then to New York, where he worked on his autobiography despite bouts of serious mental and physical illness, and died in 1952. A staunch defender of Budapest against its critics, he refrained from political activity, preferring to exercise his humour and keen eye for detail to document and poke fun at the snobbery and hypocrisy of his day.

Az éhes város was written in Geneva and Paris while Molnár was studying law, and published in book form when he was twenty-three. It was a precocious debut, and its appearance ruffled a few feathers: ‘the Budapest bourgeois literary community felt insulted by Molnár’s accurate portrayal of the greed and parvenu attitudes of the middle class’.²⁰ The novel portrays the financial and concomitant moral bankruptcy of Budapest high society, assimilated Jews’ mimicry of the corrupt gentry, and the emasculating effects of poverty. He savages the new self-styled monied aristocracy who dominated the exclusive clubs, casinos, cultural societies and local government committees, and selected only ‘their own’. *Az éhes város* is a criticism of the *pénzéhség* (hunger for money) of turn-of-the-century Budapest, its snobbery and careerism, and the coincidence between the interests of prominent rich non-Jewish conservatives and rich Jews. A portrait of the city characterised by ‘a haughty nationalism and political lethargy, a materialistic nouveau riche class and a destitute urban proletariat’, Budapest is here ‘a city of polarities’,²¹ a city where success and happiness are fleeting, illusory and contingent, and only poverty and misery are real.

The novel is the story of the recently converted bank clerk Pál Orsovai (formerly Izidor Holländer), who marries Elly Hutkinson, the daughter of an American railroad millionaire he met while recuperating from a lung complaint in Abbazia. It opens, like Kóbor’s *Budapest*,²² on Koronaherczeg Street, the shopping street in the Belváros quarter, more a promenade for the wannabe rich than the catwalk for the actually rich, Váci Street, which runs parallel. The city is first presented through the eyes of the self-conscious assimilated, noting distinctions

²⁰ István Várkonyi, *Ferenc Molnar and the Austro-Hungarian ‘Fin-de-siècle’*, New York, Lang, 1992, p. 58.

²¹ Várkonyi, *Ferenc Molnar*, p. 30.

²² See Chapter 3.

between the converted dandies in lilac shirts, and their former co-religionists still chained to small shops, tradition and therefore a deeply unfashionable outsider status. Following Orsovai's marriage to Elly in Italy, the couple return to the hungry city with her money, and he quickly becomes the darling of influential economic and political cliques. Immediately lionised by Budapest high society, Orsovai is entrusted with financial and political power for the sole reason that he has come into more money than his peers could ever have dreamed of. His fate runs parallel with that of one Ambrosio Posi, a luckless dockworker deserted by his wife and laid off in Trieste, who arrives in Budapest on the same train as Orsovai, but who is promptly arrested at the station for not raising his hat to the freshly-made millionaire. Orsovai is toasted on the platform by a *cilinderes* (top-hatted) crowd of notables, while Posi disappears into the nameless backstreets in his eternally fruitless search for work and justice, eventually moving in with an alcoholic washerwoman who beats him. His existence is central to the novel, but his story is something of an afterthought; he exists only in contrast to Orsovai, yet their fates are more linked than one is initially led to believe. Posi seeks a divorce and reinstatement to his old job, but a political stalemate exists over his fate, because he is not profitable enough to be bothered with. He finds some solace and companionship at the offices of a Budapest Italian-language paper, where he is advised to consult the king. He travels to Vienna and is received warmly by the king who expresses sympathy with Posi's fate, but Posi needs money, not honesty, to solve his problems. He ages quickly and is more or less forgotten by everyone, including Molnár, until the closing chapter of the novel.

Meanwhile, Orsovai proceeds to consolidate his wealth and power, throw banquets and have portraits painted of himself, yet this process is quite clearly shown to be an illusion that masks the reality of the 'hungry, moneyless Budapest, built on credit'.²³ Fallacious riches are what really make a man in the city. Orsovai has taken over Elly's money and, concomitantly, Budapest itself. Without money Orsovai is a nobody, a Posi, an empty shell with no tastes or opinions of his own. Taste and opinion are bestowed upon him by his business and political contacts,

²³ 'Más talán megbolondult volna ennyi milliótól, ettől a rémületesen nagy nyers hatalomtól, amit magával fog vinni az éhes, a pénztelen és hitelbe épült Budapestre'. Molnár, *Az éhes város*, p. 53.

most notably when, offered the opportunity to purchase the newspaper *Közvélemény* (Public Opinion), he announces ‘Good, I shall buy the paper. I shall be public opinion’.²⁴ Now the king of money (*pénzkirály*) and pursued by crowds wherever he goes, he still has no opinions of his own, only those he is given by others for their own financial gain. The compulsion to acquire riches is compared to alcoholism. Yet his money came not through work but by marriage to Elly. The characters of Elly and her father are flimsy, despite the fact that without them the story-line of the novel could not exist, since they are the source of the corrupting element: money.

This money appears to be neutral in Hutkinson’s hands, but once it slips into those of Orsovai, it is transformed. It is now desired and deified by the vulture-like cliques such as the *Kányák* (Kites).²⁵ Money alters personal morality as well as such mundane things as life expectancy. It dictates taste or, more precisely, those who have money create fashions and hence demand. When excluding a certain József Fehér²⁶ from membership, the conservative Faludy Society pretend to uphold traditional values and stringent quality control, all the while pandering to the public’s preference for ornamental works (*díszmű*) printed on thick paper with the author’s name prominent on the cover. Money is also intrinsically linked to race, in the sense that converted Jews must pretend that their money is old, and therefore honourable. Orsovai is completely unaware of the machinations around him despite his presentation of his self as clever which, it is implied, is the only thing required for success. Towards the end of the novel and during the parliamentary elections for which Orsovai has been put forward as a candidate by his circle of lackeys, he is visited at home by a young socialist, ‘one of those enthusiastic young men who are always angry, but do not know why’,²⁷ who warns him for reasons that remain unclear that he is being cheated left, right and centre by everyone around him. The gullible millionaire and budding politician listens

²⁴ ‘- Jó, megveszem a lapot. Én leszek a közvélemény’. Ibid., p. 113.

²⁵ A similar group, the *Sakálok* (Jackals) appears in the next novel discussed in this chapter, Herczeg’s *Andor és András*.

²⁶ That is, József Kiss (1843-1921), poet and editor of *A Hét* (The Week).

²⁷ ‘Orsovai furcsán nézett rá. Azt hitte, hogy azok közül a rajongó fiatalok közül való, akik nem is tudják, hogy miért, de folyton haragszanak’. Molnár, *Az éhes város*, p. 323.

intently and is greatly surprised to hear the revelations of this improbable messenger. Somewhat enlightened, he goes for his first, and last, philosophical stroll around the city. Such a stroll would not be complete without a trip to the Danube, where he meets a policeman on duty with whom he discusses affairs of the heart. The policeman has remained faithful to his wife throughout their marriage because his paltry wages do not allow him to treat a fancy woman to opera performances or intimate evenings in cafés. Those without money, even those with artistic talent, are excluded from the *délibáb* (mirage, chimera) and hedonism of Budapest high society.

Az éhes város also links debarment with race. Orsovai is persuaded to help support a government centre for the homeless which provides nothing for the needy, but lucrative contracts for the rich. He uses his deciding vote in favour of a prominent antisemitic contractor who has done his utmost to outmanoeuvre his Jewish competitors. Fearful that his own origins might be revealed, Orsovai is not guided by good business sense to appoint the best contractor for the most reasonable price, but by a fear of appearing philosemitic. Capitalism is thus a form of nepotism, and one expression of the relations between Jews and non-Jews. But the Jews' relation to capitalism in *Az éhes város* is the most problematic. The figures of Dorozsmay and Baradlay are introduced at the banquet scene. The former is the stereotypically wealthy Jew, unconcerned by growing antisemitism and disliked by both Gentiles and liberal Jews. The latter, Baradlay, blames antisemitism upon the Jewish bourgeoisie, and delivers a withering speech against high finance while adopting a 'man-of-the-people' posture. Jews who wished to dissociate themselves from the identification of Jewishness with pursuit of profit had either to pose as members of the gentry, or as race-less populist firebrands. Orsovai, a little nobody from nowhere who has accidentally become the focal point of the hungry city, is neither, but he still endeavours to distance himself from his origins. The banquet scene closes with a toast to him, 'the greatest Hungarian', which he laps up. He is despised by the Kisfaludy Society who none the less award him membership for his terrible poetry, and the Kites who persecute the architect

István Lénárt,²⁸ but both need his money. Antisemitism is the only reason these groups have to exclude Jews and maintain their monopoly on privilege. Conveniently, they overlook Orsovai's background and embrace him, and his wife's money, as one of their own.

The good things in life include women. Women are the playthings of the rich, to be consumed by the man about town, and Orsovai is no exception. He regards them like fine cigars, something to be indulged in as a just reward for success, and believes that there are but three kinds of female: girls, women and actresses. His penchant is for the last, but he also desires love, which he cannot separate from wealth and power. After his ex-girlfriend Anna (actress) rejects his advances, he fails to understand that she simply does not want him. He attempts to scupper the career of Anna's husband, promising himself 'Oh, little Anna will not go to the countryside. Little Anna will stay in the harem, until she softens. Little Anna must sooner or later realise that there are great and strong things in the world, but strongest of all is money'.²⁹ His money has the power to purchase some people, and to emasculate and impoverish others. *Az éhes város* does not go as far to suggest that all love affairs are forms of prostitution. It is only the proximity of money that corrupts.

It has been argued that the true hero of the novel is Budapest itself, for the protagonist is ultimately a nobody who attains riches and fame by sheer chance. In other words, Orsovai is created by the city,³⁰ and the novel portrays 'the capital's unconditional surrender to an ambitious man [and is] a relentless *exposé* of the evil effect of money'.³¹ But the city is bisected by money, thus, there are two Budapests in the novel, one rich and one poor, and never the twain shall meet. A millionaire is created overnight, but he is an apparition, because rich Budapest is founded on

²⁸ Lénárt is Ödön Lechner (1845-1914).

²⁹ 'Ó, a kis Anna nem fog vidékre menni. A kis Anna a harembe marad, amíg meg nem puhul. A kis Annának előbb-utóbb rá kell jönnie, hogy vannak nagy és erős dolgok a világban, de mindenkéül erősebb a pénz'. Molnár, *Az éhes város*, p. 259.

³⁰ Molnár Gál Péter, 'A sültgalambra váró város', *Budapesti Negyed*, 14, 1996, 4, online edition (<http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/14/molnar.html>). In Hungarian, like German, waiting for roast pigeon (*sült galamb*) to fall into one's mouth is equivalent to the English phrase 'waiting for plums to fall into one's mouth'.

³¹ Clara Györgyey, *Ferenc Molnár*, Boston MA, Twayne, 1980, p. 34.

falsehood. Orsovai's women, Elly and Anna, both choose true love over riches. Elly leaves him for her lover, Iványi, the only honest man in the novel apart from the pathetic Posi. Orsovai then learns that Anna is also moving to the countryside with her husband:

Forever.

And this pained him. All these great words, 'never, always, forever', pained him. But none of them had ever hurt as much as this 'forever' did now. These rrrr-s [...], as if some great structure were collapsing and cracking, burying everything beneath it: forever, forever ...³²

Fearing and unable to understand the irrevocable, that is, events that not even money can change, Orsovai is 'alone at the centre of the world'.³³ Unknown to him, he has been elected to parliament but, after spying on Anna and her husband kissing before their departure, he commits the sole act in the entire novel that is the expression of his free will: suicide. Workers demonstrate in the streets against his victory, something he would not have understood had he seen it. He is laid out in the morgue next to the bloated and frozen corpse of Posi, found dead on the streets. The only leveller in Budapest is, ultimately, death. Like *Az öreg tekintetes*, *Az éhes város* portrays a city of types, not people, and posits that suicide is the only viable exit from the hungry city: Orsovai and Posi arrive in Budapest on the same train, and are laid out in the same morgue. I shall now turn to the third novel, in which the city functions according to a contract between its inhabitants.

³² 'Örökre. És ez fájt neki. Mindezek a nagy szavak: "soha, mindig, örökre", fájtak neki. De még soha nem fájt egyik se oly nagyon, mint most ez az "örökre". Ezek az *r*-ek meg az a *k* a második *r* előtt úgy hangzik, mintha valami nagy alkotmány dőlné össze recsegve-ropogva, maga alá temetve mindent: örökre, örökre ...' Molnár, *Az éhes város*, p. 382.

³³ '[...] egyedül a világ közepén'. Ibid., p. 383.

Herczeg's city as contract

Ferenc Herczeg (1863-1954) was a respected conservative author whose novels, short stories and criticism were favoured by the gentry and middle classes, alongside Zola, Eugène Sue, Thomas Mann, Jókai, Mikszáth, Jósika, Arany and Gárdonyi. Herczeg only learned Hungarian at grammar school, and his earliest works he wrote in German. Trained as a lawyer in Transylvania, his first novel *Fenn és lenn* (Up and Down) was published in 1890 to great critical acclaim, following his brief imprisonment in Budapest for taking part in a duel in which the other party died. He took up a career in journalism writing for *Budapesti Hírlap*, *Új Idők* (New Times) and *Az Újság* (The News). A member of the Petőfi and Kisfaludy Societies and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, he was close to the Prime Minister István Tisza, with whom he established *Magyar Figyelő* (Hungarian Observer)³⁴ in 1911 as a conservative counterbalance to *Huszadik Század* and *Nyugat*. Actively involved in revisionist movements from 1920 onwards, Herczeg's most successful and enduring works are his historical novels which portray the demise of gentry society, informed not so much by a reactionary impulse, as by a distinctively conservative worldview according to which 'Hungarian values' had been neglected, even trampled, in the rush towards the West. Yet like so many of his peers, Herczeg had no choice but to live and work in the city he claimed was as isolated from the provinces as the intelligentsia was from country folk.

Herczeg's novel *Andor és András. Budapesti történet*,³⁵ about the lives and careers of two young journalists Andor Gombos and András Kapuváry, Jew and non-Jew respectively, was published in 1903 and was one of his few commercially unsuccessful works. Casting his conservative but critical eye over the day-to-day barter of city life and the anomalies of assimilation over the world of Budapest

³⁴ Tisza contributed to *Magyar Figyelő* under the pseudonym *Rusticus*. In its first issues, Herczeg railed against internationalism, atheism and 'pornography'.

³⁵ Ferenc Herczeg, *Andor és András: Budapesti történet* [1905], in Herczeg, *Szelek szárnyán. Andor és András*, Budapest, Singer & Wolfner, 1925.

journalism, Herczeg produced a social satire, apparently written primarily for his own amusement, which pits the fate of the naive and able young András against the cynical and unashamedly modern Jewish circles of *pesti* media and parvenu high society. In 1902, one year before the publication of *Andor és András*, Herczeg had written in *Új idők* (New Times) that Sándor Bródy's play *A dada* (The Nanny) illustrated that 'dreadfully sad allegory' of Hungarian literature: the relationship between the capital city and the countryside, between the intelligentsia and the peasantry. Budapest had not grown from the 'body of the nation', it had been deposited post-haste at the heart of the country with 'American rashness', and was in no way connected to the country's vascular system.³⁶ And one year after the publication of *Andor és András*, he announced at the general assembly of the Petőfi Society that:

Budapest, while Magyar in its language and in its sentiments, contains many alien elements in its chemical composition. The literature of Budapest, though consciously national in purpose, conceals many unconsciously alien elements. Our language is smoother and more flexible than that of the old writers, at times perhaps more folkish, but it is somehow less Magyar; our perspective may be broader but it is by no means deeper. We speak and feel Hungarian, but our minds and morals are less and less Hungarian. The social question is the rising constellation in Hungarian literature, yet we are better acquainted with the unsettling questions of French, German and Scandinavian literature than we are with those that will decide the future of the Hungarian nation.³⁷

³⁶ '... kétségbeejtően bús allegória van a darabban [Bródy, *Dada*]. Az allegória Budapest fővárosának és a magyar vidéknek, vagy ha jobban tetszik: a magyar intelligenciának és a parasztságnak egymáshoz való viszonyát jellemzi. Íme, itt a város. Az ország fővárosa, de nem nőtt ki a nemzet testéből. Nagy sebbel-lobbal, amerikai hebehurgyasággal raktuk ide az ország szívébe, hogy legyen nekünk ilyen is, de a nemzet véredényrendszerébe nem tudtuk bekapcsolni'. Ferenc Herczeg, 'Bródy Sándor sikere', *Új idők*, 1902, p. 102, cited in Horváth, *Magyar századforduló*, p. 205.

³⁷ 'Budapest, ha nyelvében és érzelmeiben magyar is, vegyi összetételében sok idegen elemet egyesít és a budapesti irodalom, ha végső céljaiban, öntudatosan nemzeti is, szerves alkatában sok öntudatlan idegen elemet rejt magában. Nyelvünk simább és gördülékenyebb a régi írókénál, olykor talán népiesebb is, mégis kevésbé magyaros, látókörünk talán tágasabb, de semmi esetre sem mélyebb. Magyarul beszélünk és érzünk, de az eszünk járása, az erkölcsünk már alig magyarok. A szépirodalom láthatárán a társadalmi probléma az uralkodó csillagzat, mi azonban jobban ismerjük a francia, a német, a skandináv irodalom nyugtalanító kérdéseit, mint azokat, melyekben a magyar nemzet jövője fordul'. Herczeg cited in *Ibid.* 205-6. The Populists continued with this train of thought when they claimed that their opponents were more concerned with the 'Negro Question' in the United States than they were with the plight of the Hungarian peasantry. 'The naive blindness of the age is absolutely astonishing. The fashion journals deplore the lot of the Negroes, but they still have no eyes for the people of the pusztas and the landleis serfs'. Gyula Illyés, *People of the Pusztas* [1936], trans. G. F. Cushing, Budapest, Corvina, 1979, pp. 88-89.

Budapest was an unsatisfactory place for Herczeg. But *Andor és András* is neither an anti-urban nor an antisemitic text. It does not promote the myth of Hungarian genius; it does not decry the ruination of the city by Jews, and, most important, it presents the fate of Jews and non-Jews as intertwined and, to a certain extent, mutually beneficial. Although Herczeg undoubtedly frowned upon a lot of what he portrayed in the novel, he did not regard the ‘city of careerists’³⁸ with nothing but scorn, but rather with regret that the values of the old gentry had become obsolete. In fact the Hungarian self-image promoted by the likes of Herczeg remained heavily influenced by the gentry’s love of sobriety, land ownership and disdain for trade up until the outbreak of the Second World War, although race theory became more of an integral part in the construction of the ideal Magyar from 1918-1919 onwards.

The novel is written in the form of a play in eighteen acts, in which the characters speak their lines with minimal supplementary information, saving Herczeg from going to the trouble of creating the background. The dialogue is colourful enough to stand alone, and although a great deal of contemporary cultural knowledge is assumed by the text, it should be remembered that Herczeg, although ostensibly writing for himself, was also addressing an educated, prosperous audience who were well acquainted with the mores and fashions of *pesti* society, which they could also afford to mock. The novel opens at the palatial Castle District residence of a certain Field Marshal Count, whose valet admits not humble,

³⁸ Gyula Szini coined the term ‘karrierék városa’ in his article of the same name in *A Hét*, July 1907, in which he described Budapest as a dangerously centralising centre which had developed along ‘American’ lines, and thus become a magnet for careerists and *Strebertum*. See *A Hét. Politikai és irodalmi szemle. Válogatás*, eds. Anna Fábri and Ágota Steinert, Vol. 2, Budapest, Magvető, 1978, pp. 462-64. For German narratives of the ‘americanisation’ of Berlin from the same period, see the sections on Werner Sombart, Franz Servaes and Karl Scheffler in Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*. Like their Hungarian peers, Sombart et. al. associated ‘Americanism’ with greed, soullessness, parvenu culture, French education and Jewish mentality. Scheffler in ‘Berlin als Kunststadt’ (1901) described post-unification wealth lying ‘in the hands of speculators and city sharks: Jewish intellectuals have studied metropolitan needs in London, Paris and New York and have awakened and satisfied a desire for them with fabulous success in the German metropole. In the sandstone palaces is housed a parvenu species that knows nothing of culture and art, but rather as substitute for them promotes fashion: it does not desire what is beautiful but what is new and ascribes eternal value only to that which has a high price. For money becomes for it the measure of value of every ideal’. Karl Scheffler, *Wien: Briefe an eine Freundin in Berlin*, Leipzig, 1908, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 174. The idea that Jews create the urban for their own ends will be seen again in 1919, following the collapse of the Commune.

polite András but aggressive, incessantly bragging Andor, for an interview. Andor decides to adopt András as his new friend, and together they embark on a whirlwind tour of balls, drawing rooms, cafés and newspaper editorial offices. They both fall in love with Ada Singer, the beautiful and unscrupulous daughter of a Jewish magnate and resident of Andrásy Street, whose rejection from membership of the Ügető club prompts him to buy Gypsy votes in order to become a member of parliament, and to launch a new, *freisinnig* paper which employs first Andor and then András.

Both Andor and András are cardboard characters, whose family backgrounds, lives and social skills are entirely predictable: their friendship pans out according to Herczeg's intention to illustrate the relationship between assimilated Jews and the upper echelons of Gentile society. Andor is a compulsive fibber whose friends regard him as something of a pathetic figure. At the Oceán coffee house, the centre of their social operations, the table of 'Scruffs' (*bolyhosok*) is populated exclusively by young Jewish intellectuals who dislike each other more than they dislike their Gentile competitors. The Chief Scruff announces that

Gombos is a seriously burdened individual. His grandfather was pet Yid to some gentleman or other, and Gombos also suffers from the secret perversion of being a pet Jew. Listen here, Gombos always has a Christian friend, whom he enthuses over, for whom he runs around in circles, and whom he waits upon. He calls this selfless friendship, but it is his inherited propensity to be a slave.³⁹

The Scruffs, like Andor, are sycophants and manipulative, and with the exception of Andor, are well aware of the fact that nobody, including themselves, can stand them. Herczeg mocks his self-hating Jews, again using Andor as a mouthpiece. The two friends go to the flat of András's mother on working-class Üllői Street, where Andor temporarily falls in love with András's sister Mici, who is already engaged to the boorish Baron Vidovics. Vidovics is rude to Andor:

³⁹ 'Gombos súlyosan megterhelt egyén. A nagyapja házizsidja volt valami úriembernek és Gombos is a házizsidóság titkos perverzitásában szenved. Figyeljétek meg, Gombosnak mindig van egy keresztény barátka, akiért rajong, akiért lótfut és akit kiszolgál. Ő ezt önzetlen barátságnak nevezi, pedig ez átöröklött rabszolgahajlama neki'. Herczeg, *Andor és András*, p. 18. The fashion for keeping a 'pet Jew' also appears in Tamás Kóbor's *Budapest* (see Chapter 3).

The whole of Hungary is liberal, but nonetheless nobody can stand the Jew. Not even the Jew himself. Scratch an Israelite and underneath you'll find an antisemite. I for one hate my own race fanatically. If I were a count and a cavalry lieutenant, I wouldn't invite reporters living between irregular denominational lines to my picnic either. Baron Vidovics is therefore right, and I am not angry at him.⁴⁰

Primarily out to impress each other, in practice they will do anything to get into the good books of influential Gentiles. Yet non-Jews feel a distinct unease in the presence of successful, assimilated Jews, and as Andor announces in one of his many over-dramatic monologues addressed to no one in particular, perfidy is in fact a Gentile characteristic:

Every poor Christian becomes perfidious in the company of rich Jews. Even the Christian beggar picks up a certain aristocratic self-assurance in the company of Jews. The poor devil never has anything save his aristocratic self-confidence. It is understandable then, if he sticks to it with desperate persistence.⁴¹

At the Singers' ball, Andor tells András that if he wants to be the next Sándor Petőfi (the entire table of Scruffs having already swooned over his naive verse), he should not waste his time studying the Kiskunság region or its horse-herders, but instead attend parties thrown by the likes of their hosts. He adds that the Jew's propensity for slavery is reflected and complemented by the Gentile's need for appreciation, flattery and patronage from their new cultural overlords. Andor's belief that non-Jews are incapable of dynamic thought or deed is, perhaps unintentionally, realised in the text. The nobility, on their deathbed, have succumbed to vanity and are slowly realising that they are losing the competition to their 'Hebrew' compatriots. But this is not presented as a life-or-death struggle between races, but a recognition of the fact that ideologies, including liberalism, genteel patriotism and posturing nationalism, were commodities in which one dealt

⁴⁰ 'Egész Magyarország liberális, de azért senki ki nem állhatja a zsidót. A zsidó maga se. Koppasz meg az izraelitát és előtte áll az antiszemita. Én magam fantasztikusan gyűlölöm a fajtámat. Ha én báró volnék és huszárfőhadnagy, magam se hívnék a piknikemre rendezetlen felekezeti viszonyok közt élő riportereket. Vidovics bárónak tehát igaza van és én nem is haragszom rá'. Herczeg, *Andor és András*, p. 32.

⁴¹ 'Minden szegény keresztény perfidde lesz, ha gazdag zsidók társaságba jár. A keresztény koldus is bizonyos arisztokratikus öntudatra tesz szert a zsidó társaságban. Az ilyen szegény ördögnek rendesen egyebe sincs, mint az arisztokratikus öntudata. Érthető tehát, ha kétségbeesett szívósággal ragaszkodik hozzá'. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

as part and parcel of *pesti* intellectual life. The best example of this is the character of Count Koller, a pretentious man whom Ada eventually weds in a marriage of convenience, a union designed by her in which the two unpleasant parties would cancel each other out, who,

as an employed publicist, presented the nation with his gift of the concept of racial-Hungarianness and non-racial-Hungarianness. The distinction caused the non-racial-Hungarians a great deal of bitterness, but it occurred to not one of them that Count Koller was of German origin. Perhaps he never thought of it either himself.⁴²

Andor's inevitable downfall comes about through two connected events. First, thanks to his boundless laziness, he leaves it to his assistant at the paper, who goes only by the name of Kis Sakál (Little Jackal), to write an article championing Kárpelesz, the Hungarian-born wonder rabbi of Łódź who, according to rumour, had been arrested and sent to Siberia. Andor signs Jackal's article 'R. K.', which stands for *régen kikeresztelkedett* (long-ago converted), and laps up the notoriety it brings him, not least of which is a pay rise from Singer. It turns out that Kárpelesz had been nowhere near Siberia, and indeed appears one day at the editorial offices, scolding the staff for smoking on the Sabbath, not writing in the Hebrew alphabet and announcing his intention to move to Budapest. They roundly ignore him, and blame Andor for peddling the rumour in the first place.

Second, András is assigned by his paper to write a counter-attack to R. K.'s piece and, as a result, is snubbed by the Scruffs at the Oceán, whereupon he indulges in some childish remarks about a shadowy international organisation led by the likes of Singer and Rothschild. The Scruffs are appalled, and Andor challenges him to a duel. Both men dread the fight: they are, after all, friends of sorts, and decide to aim their pistols away from each other. András shoots the ceiling, but Andor cannot pass up an opportunity to draw attention to himself, and claims he has been hit in the knee. He receives medical attention at the clinic of a

⁴² 'Mint alkalmi publicista megajándékozta a nemzetet a fajmagyarság és nemfajmagyarság fogalmával. A nemfajmagyaroknak sok keserűséget okozott a megkülönböztetés, de egyikük sem gondolt meg reá, hogy Koller báró német eredetű. Talán ő maga sem gondolt még erre'. Ibid., p. 64.

certain Dr Külföldy,⁴³ where he is visited by Ada. Andor, delirious at his rediscovered notoriety, confesses to Singer that he loves his daughter. Singer flies into a rage and leaves, offended at this young upstart's nerve. For once, Andor realises that he has gone too far: when he and András first visited the Singers, Andor announced that rich Jews would always marry their daughters to rich Christians over poor Jews: 'The converted Jew is only a Christian in the eyes of Christians, among Jews he is still a Jew'.⁴⁴ Andor is summarily fired from the *National Courier*, and András is appointed as his replacement. Ironically, András's Gentile former employers at *Hungarian Freedom* take Andor on as their new staff writer. The editor despairs that it is impossible to produce a paper with lazy, big-headed Christian simpletons.⁴⁵ The novel closes in the Océán, eight months later. While Andor and András meet by chance and make up, Jackal, who made his name writing preposterous crime reports in which the chief murder suspect was also the victim, is now at the head of the Scruffs' table surrounded by his 'Pups' who, as part of their war on society and reluctance to get proper jobs, decide to launch their own paper.

In the world of Andor and András, principles, ideologies and convictions are fashions or commodities to be bought and sold. Herczeg illustrates his equal disdain for the silly femininity and faddishness of high society and the vanity of male politics by contrasting Ada Singer in her study, entertaining her guests by performing a 'Negro dance' she had learnt from her American maid, lifting her skirts and saying 'All right!', with Koller in the next room, who toadies to her father, waxing lyrical on the need for vigilance against racial degeneration (*elfajulás*), and promising to recommend old Singer for membership of the Ügető Club: it is at this point that Singer gives his daughter's hand in marriage to Koller. Jews and non-Jews dislike and distrust, but also need each other, because if one wanted to succeed in the city, one had to enter into contracts which were constantly

⁴³ The Hungarian word for foreign is *külföldi*, and a -y on the end of a surname is meant to denote noble origin.

⁴⁴ 'A kikeresztelkedett zsidó csak a keresztények szemében megy némileg keresztényszámba, zsidók közt nem'. Herczeg, *Andor és András*, p. 38.

⁴⁵ 'Én szeretem a felekezetemet, de annyi biztos, hogy keresztényekkel nem lehet lapot csinálni. Mind lusták, nagyképűek és mamlaszok'. Ibid., p. 143.

under review, but none the less shaped the social rules and boundaries of the journalists' milieu. One's public self could be traded, exchanged and re-branded as the need arose. This is not a jewified world, but one in which the clever man knows who his potential patrons are, and accordingly sets about ingratiating himself with them, regardless of denomination. Here, snobbery, cynicism, self-interest and stupidity are the preserve of nobody, and everybody. In one of the most merciless scenes, Ada's Anglophile chums Muffy, Buffy and Wertheim, a bankrupt magnate, discuss their love for shooting foxes *comme les Anglaises* in Ada's drawing room while Ada's brother forges their father's signature on cheques written to himself.

As I have already argued, this is not an antisemitic novel, despite Herczeg's pillorying of assimilated Jews and the extent to which they apparently despised each other, but would band together and claim persecution if a Gentile used the word 'Jew' in a way they did not like. Andor and András, despite their differences, are ultimately interchangeable in the world of the Budapest media: they can fall in love with the same unattainable women and, when things are going well, patronise the same nightspots to drink cocktails with Austrian chanteuses by the name of Mici Rici and be entertained by American clowns who break tables over their heads. The rivalry between the two men is theatrical and overblown, but their friendship and peculiar respect for each other ultimately survive all the duelling and arguing. It is somewhat curious that Andor, the insufferable show-off, is Herczeg's mouthpiece for much of the novel. Herczeg's views on the likelihood of assimilation, relations between men and women, and *pesti* society are amplified, carnivalised and put into the mouth of a compulsive liar.

Herczeg may have been right on the question of antisemitic literature and the reading public, although not for the reason hinted at in *Andor és András*. Andor defends Koller's antisemitic diatribes at one point by stating that Jews are not at all interested in philosemites. Indeed, according to Koller, 'Jews are the most faithful readers of anti-Jewish publications. A dirty little antisemitic weekly appears in

Budapest, the name of which Christians don't even know, but every kosher watering hole has taken out a subscription'.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The notion of the 'golden years of peace' (*boldog békeidők*), a *belle époque*, from the *Ausgleich* to the Great War is one of the enduring clichés of Hungarian history. According to this myth, the *fin-de-siècle* lasted at least until 1914, when Hungarians were rudely awoken by war and collapse of the Dual Monarchy to the realisation that their pursuit of harmony and happiness was a *délibáb*, a chimera.⁴⁷ Nostalgia for a more innocent, sepia-toned Budapest of yore has also been revived in the post-Socialist period, and appears to be rather lucrative.⁴⁸ There has not, as

⁴⁶ 'Zsidóellenes nyomtatványoknak a zsidók a leghűségesebb olvasói. Budapesten megjelenik egy mocskos kis antiszemita hetilap, amelynek a keresztények a nevét se ismerik, de minden kóser csapszék előfizet rá'. Ibid., p. 97.

⁴⁷ 'Just as in the industrial sphere, Hungary was also experiencing a delayed development of the literary and artistic movements predominant in Western Europe by the turn of the century. The Hungarian *fin-de-siècle*, therefore, outlasted its Western European counterparts not ending, for all practical purposes, until 1914'. Marianna Birnbaum, 'Budapest in the Literature of the Fin-de-siècle', in György Ránki and Attila Pók (eds), *Hungary and European Civilization*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1989, pp. 331-42 (p. 331).

⁴⁸ For instance, Gyula Krúdy wrote in 1925 of the manager of the Orfeum Club in Budapest, Somosy, who 'taught Budapest how to be a metropolis', that he 'will symbolise Budapest as long as people are forced to escape the cheerless present by turning to the rosy mirror reflecting their happy days [...]. The silver bucket, the thick cigar, cigarettes from eastern lands and the dazzling girl at your table would only have been conspicuous by their absence'. Gyula Krúdy, 'Somosy, the Man Who Taught Budapest a Lesson in Nightlife', in *Krúdy's Chronicles: Turn-of-the-Century Hungary in Gyula Krúdy's Journalism*, ed. and trans. John Bátki, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2000, pp. 41-48 (p. 43). Since 1989, the need to rediscover pre-Socialist forms of culture has, on the one hand, ensured the longevity of the *népi-urbánus vita* and, on the other, created a minor industry centred around a romantic, *fin-de-siècle* Budapest. The publication of Krúdy's translated articles is only one example of the promotion of this image. Others include: Lukacs, *Budapest 1900*; anthologies of Budapest literature published by noran and Palatinus; publications of largely forgotten turn-of-the-century novels by Pesti Szalon; *Budapesti Negyed*; and the sizeable 'Budapest' sections in bookshops, featuring glossy coffee-table collections of photographs and texts from the period. A similar project has been undertaken to excavate Jewish Budapest. See, for example, Kinga Frojimovics et al., *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History*, ed. Géza Komoróczy, New York, Central European University Press, 1999. The anthologies of Budapest literature all cite 'classic' authors in their titles: Vargha cites János Arany (1817-82), Sánta and Erki cite Mór Jókai (1825-1904), perhaps because it is felt that Budapest literature must be legitimised, and this is done by incorporating it into the canon.

yet, been a serious critical reappraisal of this image of Budapest.⁴⁹ Once again, the Hungarian capital is somewhat struggling to keep up with Vienna.⁵⁰ The three novels discussed here, however, counteract the fantasy that turn-of-the-century Budapest was the playground of dandies, dreamers and geniuses. They portray a city built on snobbery, hypocrisy and greed, and which is only tangible, only real, in the rigidity of its class hierarchy. Although the attempt to create an appropriate *pesti* personality provides the structure for these novels, *Az öreg tekintetes*, *Az éhes város* and *Andor és András* posit that the individual, if he is to survive in the big city, must conceal his origins, and if he is to succeed, then he must shed all earlier incarnations of his self completely. Opportunities for self-reinvention abound, but they require the conscious decision to make oneself inconspicuous, just like everyone else, in other words, a nobody.

Those who succeed in doing so (the Tardy couple, Pál Orsovai, and Andor Gombos), may be rewarded with the comfort and privilege Budapest can offer, but are revealed to be the creations of others as much as they have managed to reinvent themselves. Only their public personas remain. Those who are incapable of such a transformation are rewarded with death (Károlyi Csurgó, Ambrosio Posi) or obscurity, and therefore ruin (András Kapuváry). In effect, the city has destroyed everyone. At best, one only loses one's true self. In *Az öreg tekintetes*, people have no inner lives. Csurgó, an alien from another planet, has nothing but time, having been robbed of his land, his personal space, as it were. Here, money is the driving force of life in the city, but makes its presence felt in the novel primarily in places where it is absent. Thus, the reader is led to conclude, only poverty preserves moral integrity and the wholeness of the self. The inability of the protagonist to change makes his unnatural death inevitable. Nature makes a clumsy appearance when it strikes back against Tardy with the old man's bees, shortly before losing him to the Danube's tide.

⁴⁹ Recent scholarship has gone some way in adjusting the rosy picture of turn-of-the-century Hungarian society. See, for instance, Gábor Gyáni and György Kövér (eds), *Magyarország társadalomtörténete. A reformkortól a második világháborúig* (A Social History of Hungary: From the Reform Era to the Second World War), Budapest, Osiris, 2001.

⁵⁰ See John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna: Origins of the Christian Social Movement 1848-1897*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981; Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*; and Beller (ed.), *Rethinking Vienna 1900*.

In *Az éhes város*, death is the only leveller. The city's money-hunger drips off every page and drives the plot, yet the enjoyment of riches is as unlikely as Csurgó's survival. Again, money is illusory, but it is because the entire city is built on credit. The heavy-handed association of financial bankruptcy with moral bankruptcy is, like the notion of success in Budapest, somewhat paradoxical. One might assume that it was material excess that corrupts, not insolvency. This is a variation of the 'dirty little homeland' idea: my country is insignificant and pathetic, but it is mine. Hungary cannot even produce a proper prosperous capital city, and instead can only mimic.⁵¹ Like Gárdonyi's novel, *Az éhes város* suggests that one's individuality and therefore happiness are only guaranteed by distance from money and power. However, *Az öreg tekintetes* offers the old man from the countryside as a sacrifice to the big bad city, whereas Molnár's hungry city forfeits two things: true love, and Jewishness. First, and predictably, marrying for money leads to unhappiness. Love between a man and a woman can only exist where there is no fiscal involvement. Second, any public form or expression of Jewishness is also denied by the city. It is only when Izidor Holländer becomes Pál Orsovai that his ascent is possible. Once he has reached the top, he must deny his own origins and take care not to appear philosemitic. He must penalise those Jewish writers and architects he has the power to promote simply because they are still 'Jewish'. They are to be punished because they have not denied their own Jewishness in order to get ahead.

In *Andor és András*, once again, mimicry and self-denial are the keys to social elevation. However, assimilation is presented as a two-way process. The aristocracy were too idle and inept to maintain their way of life, and the Jews simply too effective in organising things. The Jews are the new aristocracy, and the city has a new face. It is now the turn of non-Jews to feel 'better' for being around Jews. According to Steven Beller, writing about Jews in Vienna,

on the one hand they had left behind their former identity as Jews. They had dispensed with their inherited, historical *Eigenschaften* [...] becoming a *tabula*

⁵¹ For instance, Gyula Prinz claims in vol. 3 of *Magyar föld. Magyar faj* that other European cities (he lists Rome, Lübeck, Venice and ancient Greek city-states) enjoy a harmonious relationship with their hinterlands. Budapest, on the other hand, lives a completely separate life from the countryside. See footnote 76 in my Introduction.

rasa. On this basis they had developed an elaborate structure of *Bildung*, in order to become members of what they saw as the society and culture of a new, just and free world. [...] They lacked a collective identity. The denial of the past, a precondition of assimilation, now produced not a group of people, but only a 'sum of individuals', dependent solely on their own resources and their education, not their heritage. They were left, as it were, with a culture which was not theirs, nor anybody else's. In that sense it became very much theirs alone, for this cultural world was the one thing which could still give them some sense of identity when society could not. Culture came to be a substitute for background – roots – as the only bond between individuals [...] The coffee-houses where they met became a 'surrogate totality' to replace a social world which they did not have.⁵²

Herczeg's novel depicts Budapest as a world in which everyone, not only Jews, has exchanged 'roots' for 'culture'. The café crowds of *Andor és András*, the newspaper editorial staff and writers, and the guests at society balls are all dependent on their resources and education, and connections, not their heritage. Heritage is something to be mocked (Andor, the self-hating Jew), or affected (Koller, the patriot who is German). Herczeg's idea of the proper Hungarians are as much to blame for this state of affairs as anyone else. And because this is a city of universal assimilation (the precondition of which was denial of the past), the myth of Hungarian genius is absent, and the lives of Jews and non-Jews are interlinked and mutually dependent.

These novels of acculturation contain remarkably little detail of the city. Budapest is firmly in the background, only becoming a place when protagonists take a reflective stroll. Both Csurgó, the unassimilable, and Orsovai, the man who has assimilated so much he no longer exists, realise that their lives are worthless when wandering the streets, alone. The city has bisected the individual, into public persona and private person. Paradoxically, the invisible city has destroyed the past as well as the space in which the individual can be free, but it is the tangible city of streets and junctions, and the anonymity they provide, that liberates sufficiently to engender the interior monologue. It is impossible and ultimately pointless to ascribe one's name on the (history of the) city. There is a one-way relationship between city and individual, the former creating the latter. Many of the criticisms contained in *Az öreg tekintetes*, *Az éhes város* and *Andor és András* would later

⁵² Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, pp. 214-15.

become radicalised and politicised: the ‘fraud, avarice, mendacity, corruption, snobbery, devious revenge, and other mischiefs – in short, the immorality of Budapest [...] the parsimony of the Jewish bourgeoisie and the social and cultural snobbery of the *nouveaux riches*’⁵³ would become synonymous with Budapest itself. As yet, though, no attempt is made to subject the city to a will or force greater than one’s own,⁵⁴ because *pesti* man is alienated primarily from himself, not others.

The protagonists are all entirely incapable of stepping outside the city even conceptually which, it might be argued, is one accomplishment of assimilation. The city has shaped and restricted their imaginations completely. But even if they were to take a step back, they might find that still nothing made sense. In 1900, Sándor Bródy had attempted to subject Budapest to a more detached gaze, only to find that it disintegrated before his eyes. ‘I watch the dawn from the ramparts of Buda castle, and in it I see Buda, the elderly gentleman and his wife, his wanton little bride, Pest [...]. Wherever I look, almost every patch has a different character, there is a riot of different styles here. Private palaces look like monumental buildings and vice versa [...]. This is a city that is building its churches today!’⁵⁵ The discovery that there is no stable vantage point from within or without the city from which to view it will be discussed again in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 4. Here, though, Budapest is notably absent in the text. If it is represented, it is in the form of class hierarchy, or its obliteration of individuality. These are moral, not yet political, condemnations of Budapest. And in all three novels, the city is still national, not yet ahistorical, or entirely removed and remote from the body of the land. But it is not smudgy, carefree, sepia Budapest either. These works conclude that acculturation leads to assimilation, which in turn leads to disappearance. And, in doing so, they present an array of successfully urbanised, *pesti* individuals.

⁵³ Györgyey, *Ferenc Molnár*, p. 48.

⁵⁴ I discuss ideas of conquering the city in Chapter 3 (Kálmán Harsányi’s *A kristálynézők*, 1914) and Chapter 4 (Dezső Szabó’s *Az elsodort falu*, 1919).

⁵⁵ ‘A budai vár bástyájáról nézem a hajnalt, és abban Budát, az öreg urat és a feleségét, a kikapós menyecskét, Pestet. [...] Ahová nézek, csaknem minden foltnak más a karaktere, a különféle stílusok ülnek orgiát itt. Privát paloták látszanak monumentális épületeknek és megfordítva. [...] Egy város, amely ma építi a templomait!’ Sándor Bródy, ‘Budapest reggel’, *Fehér könyv*, Budapest, the author, 1900, pp. 77-79.

Chapter Two

Guides through the Fragmented City:

Ágai, Szerb, Nagy and others

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed three novels that depicted the process of becoming *pesti* as an anomaly, in which Budapest represented the zenith of a vicious class segregation, and simultaneously imposed a uniform psychological alienation on its inhabitants. In this chapter, I shall turn to works that attempt to explain the city using its physical form. Here, the gaze of a guide is used as a device to define the city's uniqueness in terms of its disparity and heterogeneity.

It is commonly held that the novel is the quintessential urban literary form. The simultaneous rise of the novel and the *Weltstadt* is well documented,¹ to the extent that a symbiosis of city and form has become fixed in the minds of many cultural historians. Malcolm Bradbury, for instance, writes that 'one might argue that the unutterable contingency of the modern city has much to do with the rise of that most realistic, loose and pragmatic of literary forms, the novel'.² The consensus has it that in nineteenth-century literature, the city became increasingly synonymous with flux, contingency, and all that is solid melting into air. It was the 'constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation'³ described by Marx and Engels that gave rise to a city in literature 'fragmented and transparent rather than tangible and coherent, a place consisting of bits, pieces, and shifting moods; it came to stand under the sign of discontinuity and dissociation rather than community'.⁴ But these platitudes portraying 'loneliness, isolation, fragmentation, alienation, the modern city's flux of immigrants, crowds and vulgarity'⁵ do not tell the whole story. The city also presented a symbol of possible community, albeit of a

¹ See footnote 8 in my Introduction.

² Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism' in Bradbury and McFarlane (eds), *Modernism*, pp. 96-104 (p. 99).

³ 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 223.

⁴ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 72.

⁵ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes*, p. 17.

fragmented or alien kind. The opportunities granted by cities to individuals to reinvent or lose themselves in the tumult of strangers meant that a 'specifically urban, specially civilised kind of human freedom' allowed men and women to realise that 'who I am is not simply what I do ordinarily'.⁶

The popular press and literary form

In Hungary, a symbiotic relationship existed between the city and the press.⁷ The late nineteenth-century transformation of Budapest from being Vienna's backwater sibling into a large, modern cosmopolis had been accompanied by the proliferation of popular forms closely linked to the expansion of modern communication networks, mass media and professional journalism. This relationship was not always straightforward. Rapid urbanisation had given rise to the popular press and a modern readership freed from the constraints of court, Church, and Romantic nationalism. Political parties and interest groups were quick to realise that they had at their disposal organs through which to advance their views to a wider audience. In 1910, 1,603 newspapers and periodicals were published in Hungary, and thirty-nine dailies published in Budapest alone, more than in Vienna, Berlin, or any other European capital.⁸ And yet the notions that Budapest had lost all its points of reference, that it was dominated by the ethics of speed and profit and was somehow not Hungarian, were most effectively propounded through newspaper columns and editorials. In other words, the city contained within it the seeds, and means, of its own criticism.⁹

⁶ Richard Sennett, 'An Introduction' in Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969, pp. 3-19 (p. 10).

⁷ See the articles on the press in *Budapesti negyed*, 1997, 2-3, online edition (http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/16_17/index.html).

⁸ See Fenyo, 'Literature and Political Change: Budapest, 1908-1918'.

⁹ A case in point was *A Hét* (The Week), the earliest weekly to publish up-and-coming 'big-city' writers as well as essays sharply critical of the city and its press. See Fábri and Steinert (eds), *A Hét*.

I should note at this point that the term *újságíró* (literally, newspaper-writer) was used to describe a multitude of sins. It might refer to a columnist, a writer of opinion pieces, editorials or polemics, a news reporter, or one who published short stories in dailies or weeklies. In practice, one *újságíró* may well have done all these things and more. As a rule, a writer would make his living by producing columns, essays and short stories for newspapers before attempting to establish himself as a serious novelist. The apparent ease with which writers moved between newspaper columns, short stories and novels did not go undisputed. The term *skribler* (scribbler) was used from the 1880s onwards to denote the perceived parasitic nature of newspaper writing and a certain level of literary incompetence. Ferenc Móra suggested the origin of the vogue for tarring all journalists (*újságírók*) with the same brush:

Ever since Bismarck, in one of his angry moments, called journalists ‘failed creatures’, this idea has become a common dictum. Bismarck, however, said other things, which are at least as true, but mentioned less often. Bismarck also said that a good journalist, in his eyes, was always worth more than a middle-ranking ministerial adviser, because the good journalist could always fill the place of the ministerial adviser, but the latter was rarely able to write honestly a good report.¹⁰

It was not so much that writers were suddenly passing comment on public affairs that met with criticism, but that a younger generation of men were writing for money, a distinctly ungentlemanly and *parvenu* pursuit. Writing for money, however, sustained the careers of most authors now regarded as the giants of modern Hungarian literature.

Short stories were in vogue throughout Central Europe at the time. In the words of Ferenc Molnár, the Hungarian reading public’s attention span at the end of the nineteenth century had been stunted thanks to heavy consumption of light-hearted tales of aristocratic antics by Mór Jókai. ‘All of us were compelled to write

¹⁰ ‘Mióta Bismarck egy bosszús pillanatában félbemaradt egzisztenciáknak nevezte az újságírókat, azóta szállóige lett ez az ötlet. Csakhogy Bismarck egyebet is mondott, ami legalábbis van ekkora igazság, ha kevesebbet emlegetik is. Azt is mondta Bismarck, hogy egy jó újságíró az ő szemében mindig többet ér, mint egy középszerű miniszteri tanácsos, mert a jó újságíró mindig be tudná tölteni a miniszteri tanácsos helyét, de az igen ritkán tudna becsületesen megírni egy riportot’. Ferenc Móra, ‘Mi az újságíró?’, reprinted in József P. Körössi (ed.), *Az újságíró. Magyar írók novellái*, Budapest, noran, 2003, pp. 5-11 (p. 9).

short prose fiction, often squandering our best ideas by reducing them to the limited length of newspaper stories and *feuilletons* ... Since we had been confined to this genre, it miraculously ascended to the highest level in the world'.¹¹ Zoltán Ambrus was also concerned by this 'cult of brevity' which, he argued in 1906, associated any and all moral seriousness with tedium, fed the public a relentless stream of anecdotes, scandals and 'personalities', and was guided by the sole aim of reaching as many people as possible.¹² His main concern, however, was not that journalists were turning their unqualified hands to novels, but rather that a dearth of talent was responsible for the demise of literature.

The vernacular, vulgarity, and the nation

The rapid expansion of the city and its popular press also presaged changes far beyond the matter of literary form. For the first time, the vernacular of the Hungarian capital appeared in print, and this meant a language with audible German, Yiddish and peasant influences. The population of Budapest had trebled between 1870 and 1910 and, during the same period, it became almost completely monoglot.¹³ One of the anomalies of Budapest's history is that it was the site where magyarisation was most successful: newcomers hastily dropped their native languages in favour of a Hungarian that retained feudal forms of address, while absorbing all manner of lexical innovations, such as *kibicelni* (to be a kibitzer). The use of colloquial speech was often accompanied by heavy doses of irony and the acerbic humour Budapest has frequently prided itself on, from Sándor Bródy's ten-volume *Fehér könyv* (White Book, 1900) to edited volumes of turn-of-the-century

¹¹ Ferenc Molnár cited in Györgyey, *Ferenc Molnár*, p. 45.

¹² Zoltán Ambrus, 'Irodalom és újságírás', *Szerda*, 1906, in *Vezető emlék*, Budapest, Révai, 1913, pp. 333-56, reprinted in *Esszépanoráma 1900-1944*, vol. 1, pp. 5-25 (p. 21).

¹³ While 'the majority of the population of Budapest had been German-speaking in the middle of the nineteenth century, by 1910 some eighty-six per cent of its inhabitants claimed Magyar as their mother tongue'. Fenyo, 'Literature and Political Change', p. 22.

comic writers.¹⁴ Slang and irony were not conventionally viewed as the mainstays of Hungarian literature: the Hungarian writer was not supposed to lard his prose with smutty or silly jokes, neologisms, demi-monde ‘jargon’ (which implied ‘Jewish’ speech) or tales of lewd goings-on. From the charge that the language of Budapest, and thus Budapest literature, was not properly Hungarian, came the proposition that the vernacular went hand in hand with vulgarity. Ferenc Herczeg had spearheaded this charge when he announced that Bródy and his ilk had no organic link with the nation, which dwelt in the surrounding provinces.¹⁵ Furthermore, as he told the Petőfi Society in a series of lectures in the early 1900s, the capital city’s ‘chemical’ composition was alien in language and morals; Budapest writers were only concerned with mimicking the fashions of Western literature. This was not simply ‘the manifestation of a desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve a language form, or rid it of putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language)’.¹⁶ As any Hungarian nationalist will confirm, *a nyelvében él a nemzet* (the nation lives in its language).¹⁷ What was at stake was not only the ‘purity’ of the language, but the morality, and by extension, the Hungarian-ness of its speakers.

Budapest was the most contested site in discourses of the nation: as the only great city, it was deemed to be the centre of ‘every conceivable type of Hungarian activity, from poetry to parliamentary politics, from prostitution to radical

¹⁴ See Géza Buzinkay, ‘The Budapest Joke and the Comic Weeklies as Mirrors of Cultural Assimilation’ in Bender and Schorske (eds), *Budapest and New York*, pp. 224-247; Jenő Heltai (ed.), *Magyar humoristák. Antológia*, Budapest, Athanaeum, 1920; and László Erőss, *A pesti vicc*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1982.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1.

¹⁶ George Thomas, *Linguistic Purism*, London, Longman, 1991, p. 12. This quotation is from Thomas’s own working definition of linguistic purism.

¹⁷ ‘A nation may be said to live in its language, which is at once the faithful exponent of its characteristic features, and the sure safeguard of its independence [...] Language is the mirror of every nation, the history of its past and present days [...] Who will be indifferent to the fate of a people whose language unites the bold figurative character of the East with the sobriety and exactness of the West?’ Sigismund Wékey, *A Grammar of the Hungarian Language with Appropriate Exercises, a Copious Vocabulary, and Specimens of Hungarian Poetry*, London, 1852, p. viii, cited in Peter Sherwood, ‘“A nation may be said to live in its language”: Some Socio-Historical Perspectives on Attitudes to Hungarian’ in Robert Pynsent (ed.), *The Literature of Nationalism: Essays on East European Identity*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996, pp. 27-39 (p. 28).

socialism and heavy industry'¹⁸; it had *palazzi* and slums; it was both the jewel in the national crown, and a magnet for greengrocers, domestic servants and stock-exchange speculators. To its detractors, Budapest embraced whatever was fashionable in western Europe, and rode roughshod over tradition in its mindless pursuit of novelty for novelty's sake. The implication here was that as a *világváros* (*Weltstadt*) it had more in common with other European and American metropolitan centres than it did with the towns and villages in its hinterlands. This perceived polarisation between city and countryside was a fashionable topos in European thinking in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Oswald Spengler, who was widely read by the Budapest literati, reinforced the equation by turning it on its head when he wrote in 1914 that '[t]oday, a Brandenburg peasant is closer to a Sicilian peasant than he is to a Berliner'.¹⁹ As a rhetorical topos, the city crystallised 'the conscious and unconscious anxiety about man's relation to his created world'²⁰ and, certainly in Hungary, fears about what a Hungarian form of modernity might and should look like, at a time when the Hungarian self-image was still dominated by a disdain for commerce, speculation and rapid change of any kind.

Early 'guides'

Those who attempted to make sense of Budapest's rapid growth, its heterogeneity and its ambivalent position in national discourses, rarely attempted to impose an omniscient gaze on the city and present it as a coherent entity, but instead, focused on its districts and the pathways which divided classes, dialects, and peoples. The works I discuss in this chapter portray the city as a patchwork of fragments and, in

¹⁸ Istvan Deak, 'Budapest: A Dominant Capital in a Dominated Country?' in Steven Bela Vardy and Agnes Huszar Vardy (eds), *Society in Change: Studies in Honor of Béla K. Király*, (East European Monographs 132), Boulder CO, 1983, pp. 315-26 (p. 315).

¹⁹ Oswald Spengler, 'The Soul the City', from *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, trans. C. F. Atkinson, New York, Knopf, 1928, reprinted in Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, pp. 61-88 (p. 66). *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* was published between 1918 and 1923.

²⁰ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 3.

doing so, focus on the space and time of the constituent parts of the city: Budapest as place rather than metaphor. Authors made a concerted attempt to make the city comprehensible to readers, by offering the author's own understanding of its geography, in the form of a guide. And while these mental maps of Budapest use its districts, bridges, boulevards and cafés as their primary points of reference, they are all informed by an acute consciousness of time and the pace of change. In the mid-nineteenth century János Garay had described Pest-Buda as a 'Janus-faced' city, where one face reflected the past, the other the future. In *Utcai élet* (Street Life, 1846), he proposed that inner-city Belváros was the head of the city; middle-class Lipótváros the stomach; working-class Józsefváros and Ferencváros the legs; and the orthodox and reform Jewish communities of Terézváros the hands. The city could also be read:

Incidentally, the cleverest person is he who compares Pest to a book. The splendid row of houses on the bank of the Danube may be regarded as the title page. The inscription, in which flattery is common: the guest houses. The foreword is the so-called big-city din of the streets. Its contents are the houses, people and their concerns. The table of contents: street names and shop signs. But while we find our bearings among the chaos of these stone letters, there are the commas (,) which are the streets. Semicolons (;) which once again connect the divided parts, the crossroads. Colons (:), which draw the best distinctions, are the markets. The full stops are the cemeteries.

There are asterisks (*) in this book too, which we use to imply or cite something, these are the posters, official and private announcements and so on, seen on street corners. The hyphens (-) are the coffee houses and casinos. The parentheses or brackets (), the schools. The ellipses (...), the night lighting. The dash (—) is the bridge linking the two towns. The exclamation mark (!), the uneven paving. The question mark (?), the churches. Finally, the letters are the people, who, if one studies them with intelligence and judgement, not parrot-fashion as was custom in our schools of old, one will be able to profit from this book.²¹

²¹ 'Egyébiránt legokosabban tesz, ki Pestet egy könyvhez hasonlítja. A Duna-parton pompáskodó házsor úgy tekinthető, mint címlapot. Az ajánlás, melyben hízelkedni szokás - a vendégfogadók. Az előszó az utcai úgynevezett nagyvárosi láрма. Tartalma házak, emberek s egyéb hozzá tartozandók. Mutatótábla az utcák nevei s boltcímek. De mind emellett még el nem igazodnánk e köbetük chaoszában, ott vannak a vesszők (,), melyek értelmére osztják azt, az utcák. Pontosvesszők (:), melyek az elosztott részt ismét összefoglalják, a kereszttutak. Kettős pontok (:), melyek azt még jobban megkülönböztetik, a piacok. Pontok - a temetők. Vannak e könyvben csillagok (*) is, melyekkel valamire utalni vagy valamit idézni szoktunk, ezek az utcaszögleteken látható faliragasztványok, hatósági s magánhirdetések stb. A pauzák (-), a kávéházak s casinók. A rekesz- vagy zárjel (), az iskolák. A hézagjel (...), az éjjeli világítás. A kötjel, a két város közti híd. A

Lajos Báttaszéki also guided his readers through the streets in *Fővárosi genreképek* (Capital-City Genre Pictures, 1867), and introduced them to familiar Budapest types: the organ grinder, peddler, dandy, baker's boy, cab driver, magnate, actor and politician.²² Báttaszéki did not idealise the 'vanity fair' city, deeming it none the less a European metropolis alongside Berlin, Vienna, Paris and London. In 1891 the journalist Ödön Gerő (1863-1939), writing under the pseudonym Viharos (Stormy), differentiated between districts according to language and the culture of imbibing in *Az én fővárosom* (My Capital City):

In Lipótváros there are many clubs, in the Belváros churches, in Erzsébetváros the *Imbiss*, in Ferencváros the pub, and in Terézváros the coffee house [...]. In Lipótváros the *kellner*'s favourite phrase is "pitte gleich", in Belváros "immediately", in Ferencváros "yes, right away", in Erzsébetváros "komm schon", and in Terézváros "gleich, Herr Doktor". In Terézváros there are innumerable doctors, most of whom were promoted to this rank by waiters. He who reads a Vienna paper is addressed as Herr Doktor, and he who asks for a French paper is already Herr Professor.²³

By 1900, over half the population of Budapest lived in the sixth, seventh and eighth districts (Terézváros, Erzsébetváros and Józsefváros respectively).²⁴ In Budapest, as in other European capitals, wealth was unevenly distributed, to the extent that maintaining its appearance was easier than its creation, and much time and effort were spent feigning affluence in its absence. In an article written in 1930, 'Budapest vőlegénye' (The Bridegroom of Budapest), Gyula Krúdy documented his conversations with Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky (1824-1907), the architect of

felkiáltójel (!), a göröngyös utcakövezet. A kérdőjel (?), a templomok. Végre a betűk, az emberek, kiket, ha ki jól megtanul, de nem úgy, mint boldogult diákiskoláinkban szokás vala, szajkómódra, hanem értelemmel és ítélettel tanul meg: ezen egy könyvnek több hasznát veendi ...' János Garay, 'Utczai élet', p. 252.

²² Lajos Báttaszéki (1844-1921), 'Fővárosi genreképek' in *Fővárosi Lapok*, January 1867.

²³ 'A Lipótvárosban sok a klub, a Belvárosban a templom, az Erzsébetvárosban a kifőző, a Ferencvárosban a kocsmá, a Terézvárosban a kávéház [...]. A lipótvárosi *kellner*nek szavajárása »pitte gleich«, a belvárosi »azonnal, kérem«, a ferencvárosi »igenis, mindjárt«, az erzsébetvárosi »komm schon«, a terézvárosi »gleich, doctor úr«. A Terézvárosban temérdek sok a doctor, legtöbbjét a kávéházi pincer promoveálta azzá. Aki bécsi lapot olvas, doctor úr, aki francia lapot kér, már herr professzor'. Ödön Gerő writing under the pseudonym Viharos, *Az én fővárosom*, Budapest, 1891, pp. 41-2, cited in Sánta, "Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa", p. 201.

²⁴ Károly Vörös, 'Birth of Budapest: Building a Metropolis, 1873-1918' in András Gerő and János Poór (eds), *Budapest: A History from Its Beginnings to 1998*, Atlantic Studies on Society in Change 86, trans. Judit Zinner et. al., Highland Lakes NJ, Atlantic Research and Publications, 1997, pp. 103-38 (p. 105).

Andrássy Street, in which he claimed that the boulevard was built solely for the purpose of giving the ladies of Budapest a promenade on which to show off their latest sartorial acquisitions, and to bring a metropolitan air the length of Terézváros.²⁵ The city was a stage for individuals to assume modern roles, to (re-)invent themselves as sophisticated characters to whatever extent possible. The process of creating such personas formed the inspiration for Krúdy's novels which, in the 1910s, were little more than over-extended *dramatis personae*, mood pieces in which Budapest provided a network of meeting places where 'real and fake courtesans' and 'depraved men and sold women'²⁶ act out their hopeless trysts. But this construction of the self for an eager audience had its pitfalls too. Ludwig Hirschfeld observed that the question 'Is he a Jew?' was ubiquitous in interwar Vienna and Budapest, to which 'all other questions are of secondary importance.' At issue was the explanation of achievement. 'I advise you not to be too interesting or remarkable during your stay in Vienna,' he noted in *Was nicht in Baedeker steht: Wien und Budapest*, 'otherwise people will try to make out that you are a Jew.'²⁷

²⁵ Krúdy cites Podmaniczky: 'On Andrássy Avenue no one had her train stepped upon, no one's galloping steed was forced to come to a halt (since I had a separate roadway built for people on horseback, recalling how difficult it had been to gallop about in the Inner City during the days of my youth) – nor did provincial gentlemen from all parts of the country, here to show off their skill as drivers, have to curb their fleet equipages. [...] Yes, Andrássy Avenue was the freeway of aristocratic liberties where everyone found his own delights, amusements, and good cheer – and for this reason I refrained from erecting a temple here for any clerical religion, other than the arts.' Krúdy Gyula, 'The Bridegroom of Andrássy Avenue', 9 November 1930, in *Krúdy's Chronicles*, pp. 21-26 (p. 23).

²⁶ '[I]gazi és álkurtizánok [...], züllött férfiak és eladott nők', Krúdy's letter to József Kiss, *A vörös postakocsi*, pp. 7-9 (p. 8).

²⁷ Ludwig Hirschfeld, *The Vienna That's Not in the Baedeker*, trans. T. W. MacCallum, Munich, 1929, originally published as *Was nicht in Baedeker steht: Wien und Budapest*, Munich, 1927, cited in Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought*, New York, Knopf, 2002, pp. 356-57.

The Coffee House

The quintessential Central European institution for the cultivation of intellect and style was the coffee house. One cannot read an autobiography from the turn of the century without coming across loving descriptions of the years spent drinking coffee and perusing the papers in a coffee house. Coffee houses provided a public space in which the serious author and *skribler* could be at home; the semi-private sphere, as Gábor Gyáni has described it.²⁸ Gyáni writes that the coffee house was, for the nineteenth and part of the twentieth century, one of the most characteristic institutions of social life in European cities and large towns: it created for the urban middle classes a ‘democratic’, relatively intimate semi-public space straddling the private and public spheres. The 1895 *Pallas Nagy Lexicon*a recorded that there were 1,377 cafés in Hungary, 663 of which were in Budapest.²⁹ All tastes and wallets were catered for, from the lowly *kávéfőző* (coffee bar) to the institutions on Andrassy Street bedecked with chandeliers and palm trees. The vogue for ostentatious decoration often got the better of taste, a fact parodied by Ferenc Herczeg, in the form of the ‘Oceán’ coffee house in *Andor és András* (Andor and András, 1903):

The coffee house is dotted with Budapest-Moorish motifs and is furnished in a half-Byzantine, half-Baroque style. The ceiling is painted with pictures by famous, but disreputable artists. Enormous mirrors and bronze candelabras flaunt themselves in between the marble columns. The cashier is seated beneath a golden iconostasis. On the tables are countless Hungarian and foreign papers, through which the regular guest rummages

²⁸ Gábor Gyáni, ‘A kávéházba járó polgár’, *Budapesti Negyed*, 12-13, 1996, 2-3, online edition (http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/12_13/gyani.html).

²⁹ Turn-of-the-century writers were clearly so enamoured of cafés that their love letters have warranted the recent publication of collected short stories. See Edit Erki (ed.), *Négyszáz éves kapuciner: Magyar írók novellái kávéházakról*, Budapest, Palatinus, 2002. Gábor Sánta also dedicates a chapter, “‘Vigasztal, ápol és eltakar.’ A budapesti kávéházak szociológiai és pszichológiai természetrajza a századfordulón” to cafés in “*Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa*”, pp. 199-233.

in a blasé fashion. The waiters are truly elegant, though this cannot be said of the guests.³⁰

Patrons of such institutions rarely matched the décor. Despite the rumblings from conservatives, typified as early as 1838 by András Fáy who thundered that coffee houses encouraged superficiality and pandered to the vain person's desire to be seen,³¹ more often than not, the coffee house provided more congenial surroundings than those to be found at home, and comfortable leather chairs from which revolutions were fomented and governments run.³² Ferenc Molnár described coffee houses as the real offices of Hungarian men of letters: 'We did our writing in those places, not to be Bohemian, but because most of us did not have any other decent quarters',³³ a theme later picked up by Zsigmond Móricz. The protagonist of *Jobb, mint otthon* (*Better than at Home*, 1934) states that 'people in Pest live in such sad homes. Dark flats, high rents; worry and poverty: this is what most people come to ... Which is why Budapest has the highest number of coffee houses in the world'.³⁴ Jenő Heltai, in his poem 'Kávéházi elégia' (Coffee-house elegy) spoke of the coffee house as a terrible, tarted-up hospital (*rettenetes, cifra kórház*) in which the fake velvet and marble received their sick, homeless patrons living off credit.³⁵ Coffee, it seems, ranked low among the attractions.

³⁰ 'A kávéház budapesti mór motívumokkal tarkított félig bizánci, félig barokk ízlésben van berendezve. A mennyezet képei neves, de rosszhírű művészek festették. A márványoszlopok közt hatalmas tükrök és bronz kandeláberek pompáznak. A pénztárosnő arany ikonsztázion alatt ül. Az asztalokon rengeteg magyar és külföldi lap, amelyek között blazírtan turkál a törzsvendég. A pincérek igen elegánsak; a vendégekről ez nem állítható'. Herczeg, *Andor és András*, p. 15.

³¹ See 'Ész- és szívkalandok' in András Fáy, *Fáy András szépirodalmi összes munkái*, vol. 8, Pest, n.p., 1844, pp. 203-08.

³² Károlyi Mihály's government of October 1918 to March 1919 was based not in Parliament, but in the café on the ground floor of the Astoria Hotel in Pest.

³³ Phillip Minoff, 'Author in Exile', *Cue*, 28 January 1950, p. 16 cited in Györgyey, *Ferenc Molnár*, p. 46.

³⁴ 'Az emberek Pesten milyen szomorú otthonokban laknak. Sötét lakások, nagy házbérek; gond és szegénység: ez jut a legtöbb embernek ... Ezért van az, hogy Budapesten van a legtöbb kávéház a világon'. Móricz Zsigmond, *Jobb, mint otthon* in *Móricz Zsigmond regényei és elbeszélései*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1963, p. 612.

³⁵ 'Óh, / Rettenetes, cifra kórház, / Ahol mű-bársony és mű-márvány / Fogadja azt, ki hajléktalan-árván / Beténfereg. / Itt meggyógyul a sok beteg, / Elkeseredett pária, / Ki a hitelbe hozott kávéhoz / A sült galambot várja. / Itt a melegben és a füstben / Melytől kicsordul a szemedből a könnyű, / Feledni és vigasztalódni könnyű!' Heltai, 'Kávéházi elégia' in *Heltai Jenő versei*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1962, pp. 237-39.

The coffee house fulfilled the need for community. Tamás Kóbor in ‘Budapest a kávéházban’ (Budapest in the Coffee House), an article written for the Christmas 1892 edition of *A Hét*, remarked that every new coffee house that opened was immediately full, without depleting attendance at neighbouring institutions, and that this illustrated that the need for the coffee house itself created new businesses. What is more, there was a human desire for rich ornamentation, enormous mirrors and opulent light fittings, in a word, luxury. The coffee house, he continued, was not merely the place where one could get a cup of black coffee, but itself represented the product of civilisation, the necessary reason for cultural development, and the symptom of a general psychological state.³⁶ The intimate atmosphere of coffee houses was also likened to little nests of rural life in the big city, filled with curiosity, gossip and slander: Sándor Márai described them as ‘writer-aquariums’ (*író-akvárium*) in *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a Bourgeois, 1934). Here, the coffee house is portrayed as city life in miniature, that is, the coexistence of numerous small communities which had little in common, other than being located within the city boundaries. And although the city may have regarded itself to be more imposing, as Ignotus pointed out, the metropolitan veneer was rather thin:

We are no different from Vienna, we resemble Vienna in this respect. Because Vienna itself is the same, Vienna is also a massive village with its two-million village folk, surrounding the old family castle. [...] As the Pest bourgeoisie, male and female, sit in the windows of cafés from three in the afternoon to three in the morning, one feels that these souls are still those good villagers, leaning on one leg with their heads tilted to the side and with one eye peeping up from doorways or shop entrances along the main road. Which is, I concede, endearing, but it is not elegant.³⁷

³⁶ ‘[A] kávéház nemcsak egy ipartestület kereseti forrása, nemcsak hely, ahol feketét lehet kapni, hanem produktuma egy bizonyos fokon álló civilizációnak, szükségképpen való okozata valamely kulturális fejlődésnek, és szimptomája egy általános pszichológiai állapotnak’. Kóbor Tamás, ‘Budapest a kávéházban’, *A Hét*, December 25 1892, pp. 828-29 (p. 829).

³⁷ ‘S tulajdonképp ez is bécsi hatás; ebben sem különbözünk Béctől, ebben is hasonlítunk hozzá. Mert maga Bécs is ilyesmi, maga Bécs is egy rengeteg falu, két millió falusi nép, mely egy nagy família ősi kastélyát körülveszi. [...] Ahogy a pesti polgárság – himje és nőténye – délutáni háromtól hajnali háromig megüli a kávéházak ablakait, az emberrel az érezteti, hogy ezek a lelkek mélyén még mindig azok a jó falusiak, kik fél lábra nehezdedve, féloldalt hajtott fejjel, fél szemmel sandítanak végig az utcaajtóból vagy a boltajtóból az országúton. Ami igen kedves dolog, megengedem, de: nem elegáns’. Ignotus, ‘A budapesti elegancia’ in *Ország-Világ Almanach. I.*, ed.

The Budapest (or, indeed, Budapests) portrayed in the autobiographical novel by Adolf Ágai (1836-1916), writing under the pseudonym Porzó, the short novels by Antal Szerb (1901-45) and Lajos Nagy (1883-1954) and the short stories and essays by Viktor Cholnoky (1868-1912), Géza Csáth (1887-1919) and Jenő Rejtő (1905-1943) span almost a century. They are guides through the past and present of the city. Here, Budapest is navigated with reference to the districts and diverse cultures of the streets; it is the subject of spats between writers and journalists, all of whom depend on it for a living; and it is in a process of becoming. Everything is in flux and the city's inhabitants are always in the middle of doing something or becoming someone (or no one). Nothing is finished or fixed, and it is the writer's acknowledgement of this which posited the idea of Budapest as a place of process, rather than a symbol of all that was wrong. The process of becoming a modern writer is also documented in these works, in tandem with an attempt to make sense of the city. For the writer who came to the city to make his name, the moment of arrival could not be pinned down to one event such as disembarking from the train, but occurred continually in the most seemingly trivial of everyday events. For Sándor Márai:

[O]ne does not arrive in a city by alighting at the railway station, picking up one's bags and saying to oneself: Well, now I've arrived in Pest. [...] One arrives infinitely slowly, through the details, in a city. [...] One does not come by train, but with good intentions, aims and interests. When one has unpacked and dispensed of all this, one begins to arrive. [...] One should not duel. One should not shout. All one can do is to breathe a little easier, and say quietly to oneself: Well, now I'm beginning to be at home here.³⁸

by Antal Váradi and Zsigmond Falk, Budapest, 1914, pp. 204-08, cited in Sánta, "*Minden nemzetnek van egy szent városa*", p. 206.

³⁸ 'Mert az ember egy városba nem úgy érkezik meg, hogy leszáll a pályaudvaron, fogja a táskáját, s azt mondja: Na, most megérkeztem Pestre. [...] Az ember végtelen lassan, részletekben érkezik meg egy városba. [...] Nem vonattal érkezik meg az ember, hanem jó szándékkal, célokkal és érdeklődéssel. Ha ezt mind kipakolta és elosztogatta, akkor kezd megérkezni. [...] Nem lehet párbajozni. Nem lehet kiabálni. Csak annyit lehet, hogy az ember fellelégtzik, s csendesen mondja: Na, kezdek itthon lenni idehaza'. Sándor Márai, 'Egy doboz Coronas', reprinted in Erki (ed.), *A hajdani hangos Budapest*, pp. 354-8 (p. 358).

Porzó (Adolf Ágai): Journey from Pest to Budapest, 1843-1907

The first guide through the city I discuss was written by Adolf Ágai (1836-1916), first published in 1908, and entitled *Utazás Pestről-Budapestre 1843-1907. Rajzok és emlékek a magyar főváros utolsó 65 esztendejéből* (Journey from Pest to Budapest 1843-1907: Sketches and Memories from the Last 65 Years of the Hungarian Capital),³⁹ a colourful invocation of the old Pest which, Ágai claimed in the introduction to the third edition, was vanishing forever. Ágai was already a household name when *Utazás* was published, having edited the satirical weekly *Borsszem Jankó* from 1867 onwards under the pseudonym Csicseri Bors. A well-known comic writer and journalist, Ágai was the butt of many antisemitic jokes in other satirical papers, which frequently depicted him as a pig or a dog. According to Aladár Komlós, his self-conscious Hungarian-ness made him a figurehead of assimilation:

Ágai became the true model for the [nineteenth-century] hungarianised Jew. His manner is of big-city-ness grafted onto the Magyar, telling anecdotes like a provincial judge, and playing the violin so well that the Gypsies thought he was one of them. He is Hungarian, proudly and gladly so [...] Ágai's general deportment is characterised by a duality, in that, on the one hand, he attacks those Jews who had not yet fulfilled their main responsibility – they had not become Hungarians – and on the other, he fights against restrictive, malignant antisemitism. [...] He fights on two fronts [...] in the interests of true *Freisinnigkeit* and of the Jews' hungarianisation.⁴⁰

In the foreword, Ágai states his intention not to offer a scholarly monograph, but to present the upheavals endured by the city by way of small sketches, 'pour servir à

³⁹ Adolf Ágai (Porzó), *Utazás Pestről-Budapestre 1843-1907. Rajzok és emlékek a magyar főváros utolsó 65 esztendejéből*, Budapest, Pallas, 1912.

⁴⁰ 'Ágai valóban mintaképe lett a múlt századi megmagyarosodott zsidónak. Modora magyarba oltott nagyvárosiasság, úgy anekdotázik, mint egy vidéki táblabíró, s úgy játszik a hegedűn, hogy a cigányok a vérükből valónak gondolják. Örömmel és büszkén magyar [...] Ágai magatartását általában a kettősség jellemzi, hogy egyfelől támadja azokat a zsidókat, akik még nem teljesítették legfőbb kötelességüket: nem magyarosodtak meg, másfelől harcol a szűkkeblű és gyűlölködő antiszemitizmus ellen. [...] E típusok rajzában ismét kétfelé harcol: az igazi szabadelvűség és a zsidók megmagyarosodása érdekében'. Aladár Komlós, *Magyar-zsidó szellemi történet a reformkortól a Holocaustig*, vol. 2, Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 1997, pp. 169-72.

l’histoire de mon temps’.⁴¹ His recollections of the development of ‘our Budapest’ from a small German town into the country’s ‘radiant, *Hungarian* capital’, and its elevation into the ranks of Europe’s ‘most beautiful and orderly’ cities, are, from the outset, nostalgic: ‘This journey of mine begins on a wagon, and ends in the era of fast trains furnished with red velvet armchairs’.⁴² *Utazás* begins with his recollections of coming to the city for the first time as a seven-year-old in 1843. The child’s feelings are of propriety towards the city, the location of all his adventures, mixed with his confused grasp of history: he expects to see the Turks in their harems and streets paved with ostrich eggs. He is mature enough, however, to be amused by his observation that Hungarian was spoken only by Gypsies, and that all the rest was German. German was the language of trade, spoken by German and Slovak peddlers of Danube water, lamp oil, sausages, pretzels and eggs. The Slav eggler was of particular curiosity to Hungarian-speakers, who were never sure whether the eggs were laid by Hungarian chickens or not. The author expresses his admiration for the French Institute’s protection of the French language, but insists that in Budapest, the co-existence of German and Hungarian is natural, a mutually beneficial process. Later on in *Utazás*, he joyfully recounts the anecdote of a Viennese friend who stopped in front of a Budapest toy-shop with his son to look at the display of a drumming rabbit, whereupon the boy asked, confusing *lebendig* with its Hungarian equivalent *eleven*: ‘Nicht war [*sic*] Papa, dieses Kaninchen ist elewendig?’⁴³

A number of constants remain throughout Ágai’s travels through time and the city. Budapest is the meeting point of East and West, the rural and urban, German and Hungarian, privilege and poverty. In its process of becoming a big Hungarian city, service industries prosper and forms of mimicry are perfected by those wishing to get ahead. The author makes no forays into private space, nor does

⁴¹ ‘Leszögezni a multat, mielőtt régmulttá válik: az volt célom e könyv kiadásával. Czime rámutat foglalatára: nem tudományos monográfiát nyújtok benne, csak apróbb rajzokban kívántam feltüntetni azt a gyökeres változást, melyen ez a város, kiváltképen az utolsó harminc év alatt átment’. Ágai, *Utazás*, pp. 5-6.

⁴² ‘Kezdődik ez az én utazásom fakó szekéren – végződik piros bársony zsöllyékkal bútorozott gyorsvonati szakaszban’. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 314.

he speculate on the relationship between public urban life and private morality. Everything in the city appears to serve a purpose, whether it be the opportunity to make money, eat good food, ponder suicide or to fall in love. Having meandered through theatres, hospitals and schools, and across bridges, he muses on the public baths which, he claims, are better the further east one travels: 'Therefore good coffee, barbers and baths are the tripartite criteria for barbarity'.⁴⁴

Public squares in particular signify social difference. Ágai describes Erzsébet Square as a Libyan Desert patronised by the devil, sparrows, and Austrian merchants; István Square is characterised by hunger, intoxication, crowds of scoundrels and idiots, and poor women eating with their hands at the *Laczikonyha*. This square is also a marketplace for Jewish and Gentile traders, selling goose liver and pork respectively, but all hawking unhealthy-looking fish swimming in filthy water. Széchenyi Square attracts pretty Gypsy violinists, English princes and other dandies; Sebestyén Square is the home to the Pilvax café where young students, who prefer teaching to studying, proclaim 'the Hungarian idea' from the safety of billiard tables; while Barátok Square is one of the surviving remnants of old Pest, where men of learning congregate quietly. But not all change is welcomed. Ágai complains that in summer, the *Városligeti séta* (City Park promenade) was barely recognisable, now that it had been cut in two by the introduction of a bus route. Once reminiscent of an old cemetery or mausoleum of long-dead nationalities, it was now a victim of the craze for hungarianisation and modernisation. *Utazás* threatens, but never quite delivers mawkishness, because the author is even more keen to publicise his sense of humour. Noting the disappearance of German street names, Ágai suggests that one of the seats of the Körönd should enjoy an inscription reading 'This is the seat on which Ferenc Deák never sat'.⁴⁵

Ágai's Budapest is one in which everyone must assimilate to new ways of life, not only the Jews. He recalls his days at the Kagál Club, a public forum

⁴⁴ 'Tehát a jobb kávé, borbély és fürdő, hármas kritériuma a barbárságnak'. Ibid., p. 67.

⁴⁵ 'Ahol egyszer Deák Ferencz udvart tartott, nem jelzi emlék a helyet. Pedig egy emberséges kőfaragó ingyért ajánkozott, hogy ő oda egy szép nagy zsöllyét állít sóskuti termékből, amelyre akkoriban a «Borsszem Jankó» írástudói a következő jelentős inscriptiót szerkesztették: «Ez az a szék, amelyen Deák Ferencz sohasem ült.»' Ibid., p 118.

established by Jews in response to Győző Istóczy's speeches in parliament on Jewish secrecy,⁴⁶ even though 'we were not "Jews" one little bit, that is plaintiffs or usurers'.⁴⁷ The 'boys' at the Kagál, however, had bigger and better ideas, leaving Ágai and his ageing chums to themselves at the Otthon (At Home) Club, where they puzzled over the Masonic significance of the younger generation's favourite symbols, ☉□△.

Like Lajos Nagy, whose *Képtelen természetrajz*⁴⁸ (Absurd Natural History, 1921) provided a pseudo-encyclopaedia of Hungarian 'types' some ten years later, Ágai reserved his most astute observations for his chapter on Budapest personalities, which reads like a zoological taxonomy. The gamut of city types ranges from the prototype Hungarian bohemian Gazsi Bernát, allegedly of mixed gentry and Gypsy descent, a lovable buffoon to be found in his natural habitat the Golden Eagle, to carters and porters, pioneers in the age of service, complete with Slav assistants from villages where only the priest's water is drinkable. Those in between include that speciality of old Pest, the National Baron (*a nemzet bárója*) who joined the Hungarian Army after failing to liberate his homeland (Poland) in 1848, and who now accumulates enormous tailor's bills while strutting up and down Váci Street and along the Danube promenades, impressing passers-by with his mastery of Greek, Arabic and 'Cockney'. Ágai recounts tales of Uncle Mohácsi, the smiling hippopotamus who qualified as a lawyer in the Bach era and, in the 1860s, intensified his war against that quintessentially useless modern invention, the top hat; dervishes from the Sudan who arrived here like Gül Baba, mistaking the hospitality and prevalence of tobacconists for 'the East'; firemen who look as if they have just escaped from hell; store detectives; boot-blacks whose services are greatly appreciated by those arriving from the countryside who need the mud and muck scraped from their boots; newspaper boys; magicians and

⁴⁶ Győző Istóczy (1842-1915), formerly a member of parliament for István Tisza's *Szabadelvű Párt*, attended the first international antisemitic conference in Dresden in 1882, and established the short-lived *Országos Antiszemita Párt* (National Antisemitic Party) in 1883.

⁴⁷ 'Ami annál is nevezetesebb, mert egy csöppet sem voltunk «zsidók», t. i. fölperesek és uzsorások'. Ibid., p. 258.

⁴⁸ This is a pun: *képtelen* means both 'without pictures' or 'unillustrated', and 'absurd'. Lajos Nagy, *Képtelen természetrajz*, Budapest, Kultúra, 1921, reprinted in *Nagy Lajos válogatott művei*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1973, pp. 1123-202.

con-men; and journalists such as Mr András, described as an *anármista*, something between an *alármista* (alarmist) and *anárkista* (anarchist). Women make their brief appearance in the chapter on cabaret entitled ‘Budapest chez nuit’. Budapest is home to all, whether they are stuck in the past or scheming for the future. Nobody needs stake a claim to belonging, because no one individual is more or less entitled to regard himself as *pesti*.

Ágai ends his journey thinking about what Budapest might be like in a thousand years’ time. Although real Hungarian culture will still exist in the distant future and *Bánk bán*⁴⁹ will still be read, there are twenty-six bridges over the Danube and the City Park lake has been appropriated by the Jews. Imagining the city even thirty years from now, he is sceptical:

I grew dizzy from the many plans, with which Budapest will be propelled among the very first cities of Europe, from all the unknown streets, palaces, bridges, squares, parks and churches. [...] Until then, I do not really want to live in this kind of Potemkinopolis, where one is chased by the house’s owner every three months from forint to forint, from floor to floor.⁵⁰

Utazás enjoyed an annual reprint for five years after its first publication in 1908. Its immense popularity in Budapest was due, in part, to its subject matter: the city and its inhabitants who liked to read about themselves. It was also reassuring, striking a fine balance between humour, nostalgia and sentimentality. Its rosy depiction of the city satisfied the popular demand to read comforting tall tales of the past. But Ágai’s way of compiling small sketches or out-takes from city life, which together added up to something greater than the sum of its parts, a large book about a metropolis that was indisputably Hungarian, was rare for its day. The lack of insights into private space and individuals’ thoughts and lives was also unusual. He made no effort to draw gloomy conclusions or moral lessons from the pace of change. *Utazás* does not even hint that large urban settlements were somehow

⁴⁹ József Katona’s (1791-1830) play *Bánk Bán* (1819) is commonly regarded to be one of the greatest national dramas, if not the greatest.

⁵⁰ ‘Megszédültem attól a sok tervtől, mellyel Budapestet Európa legelső városai közé akarják föltervezni – a sok ismeretlen utcától, palotától, hidtól, tértől, parktól és templomtól. [...] [A]ddig nem is akarok lakni az efféle Potemkinopolisban, valameddig a háztulajdonos nem kerget föl minden évnegyedben forintról-forintra, emeletről emeletre’. Ágai, *Utazás Pestről-Budapestre*, p. 438.

harmful or antithetical to Hungarians. Indeed, Ágai had presented a city which was Hungarian precisely because of its colour, eccentricity and diversity. The time span of the guide, the transformation of Pest and Buda into a Hungarian city, also coincided with the assimilation of Jews. Ágai's creation of himself as an eccentric, larger-than-life Hungarian, neatly corresponded with the journey from Pest to Budapest.

Szerb's Guide to Budapest for Martians, 1935

Antal Szerb's *Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára* (Guide to Budapest for Martians) was first published in *Nyugat* in 1935.⁵¹ Szerb was born in Budapest in 1901 and trained as a teacher of Hungarian, English and German. His poems and translations appeared in *Nyugat* from 1921 onwards under the pen-name Kristóf, but he is best remembered for his *Magyar irodalomtörténet* (Hungarian Literary History, 1934), in which he argued that Hungarian literary history was European literary history in miniature. It is still a compulsory secondary-education text. Szerb died in the Balf labour camp in western Hungary in 1945. *Budapesti kalauz* is notable for its dearth of people. The narrator presents the city to a visitor from outer space without spending too much time passing comment on its inhabitants.

One fine day a Martian was lucky enough to arrive in Pest. He took a room at the Bristol, brushed the star dust from his clothes and telephoned me, so that I could show him the City as agreed in our earlier conversation.

Sir, respected Alien, before all else I must emphatically request that you do not listen to those journalists [*újságírók*] and other talented observers of note who will tell you that the Pest man is like this or like that. The Pest man, of whom they speak, is exactly like every other trader who has no money.⁵²

⁵¹ Szerb Antal, 'Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára', *Nyugat*, 1935, 2, pp. 99-106, was also published as an illustrated childrens' book by Officina in 1945. I shall refer to the reprint in Erki (ed.), *A hajdani hangos Budapest*, pp. 59-72.

⁵² 'A Marslakó egy szép nap szerencsésen megérkezett Pestre, szobát vett a Bristolban, lekefélt ruhájáról a csillagok porát és telefonált nekem, hogy megbeszélésünk értelmében mutassam meg

Having established that the city's residents are of no particular interest, the narrator moves swiftly on to the buildings, the 'erotica of the streets merging into each other, [...] the climatic relations of public squares and statues, the literary associations of bus numbers, or something like that'.⁵³

Like Ágai, Szerb was sentimentally, even romantically attached to his home town. Szerb, also an assimilated Jew, was already an established writer when he wrote the Guide, at a time when the liberalism of the pre-war years was long dead, the Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös had signed an alliance pact with Mussolini, and the *népi-urbánus vita* was in full swing. *Budapesti kalauz* is now a largely forgotten work.⁵⁴ The guide for Martians offers no explanations, only connections, and tells a story tailored to fit the city. The reader is never cajoled. Unlike *Utazás*, an exercise in style and flourish, the *Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára* was written with a timeless precision. It is possible that for Szerb, explaining Budapest to his compatriots was too arduous a task. Addressing an Martian, then, provides an ideal mask, because the narration must be simple.

The narrator advises the Martian to stroll across the 'infernally long' Chain Bridge to Buda with a lady, and then return to Pest, preferably with the same lady; they will undoubtedly discover love along the way because the bridge is so long. 'Budapest is the city of true and profound love. Believe me, Sir, he who knows the city can only speak of it with tears in his eyes'.⁵⁵ This love is also an understanding and appreciation of the plural nature of the city. Just as the river has two sides, the narrator explains, Budapest has two historical layers: the Baroque, which is Catholic, German and bourgeois in spirit; and the 'Empire' layer, which guards the memory of Greater Hungary. And on either side of the Danube are two different worlds, 'on the Pest side are musical coffee houses which open and shut, and on

neki a Várost. Uram, igen tisztelt Idegen, mindenekelőtt arra kell nyomatékosan kérem, ne hallgasson az újságírókra és a jeles megfigyelő tehetségekre, akik azt fogják Önnek mondani, hogy a pesti ember ilyen meg olyan. A pesti ember, akiről ők beszélnek, éppolyan, mint minden más kereskedő, ha nincsen pénze'. Ibid., p. 59.

⁵³ '[A]z utcák egymásra hajló erotikája [...] a közterek és a szobrok éghajlati viszonyai, az autóbusszámokkal kapcsolatos irodalmi asszociációk, vagy valami ilyesmi'. Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁴ See the 1945 edition published by Officina, Budapest.

⁵⁵ 'Budapest az igaz és mélységes szerelmek városa. Higgye el, uram, aki ismeri ezt a várost, csak könnyezve tud beszélni róla'. Szerb, *Budapesti kalauz*, p. 61.

the Buda side are chestnut trees'.⁵⁶ The guide proceeds away from the waterfront, visiting the commercial part of the Belváros, Gellért Hill and the Tabán district at its feet, inspiration for Imre Vahot, Gyula Krúdy and generations of lovers. It is where every Tristan will find his Isolde. The city is associated with youth:

But I do not specialise in one part of the city in terms of youth, for Budapest has no part which, for me, would not mean youth. If I ever had to leave the City as the result of some awful forced dispersal, which appears to befit the rhythm of my people's fate, I would grow old on that day like the monk of Heisterbach.⁵⁷

The Martian and the reader are then drawn back to the Danube which, with its seafaring atmosphere, displays all known life-forms for perusal. 'Sir, You cannot even imagine how rich this city is in opportunities'.⁵⁸ The proximity of water prompts an exposition on the nature of time, the universal eternity of nature in contrast to the particular transience of poets. The old poets, the Martian is informed, paid scant attention to the details of the city, but all the same, their thoughts turned to the ephemeral nature of existence when standing by this great river.⁵⁹ There then follows a gentle reminder that the great Hungarian writers all paid their respects to the city. Elegies to the river were written by Pál Ányos (1756-84), József Gvadányi (1725-1801), Benedek Virág (1754-1830) and, that 'wonderful liberator of Hungarian words', Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-55), who played with the notion that the irresistible flow of the Danube ensures the passage of time itself. The narrator casts a cursory glance over the sights of the Castle, the Fisherman's Bastion and Mátyás Church before returning to residential districts, among them Óbuda, once home to the twelve tribes of Israel who rented rooms here, having been forbidden entry to Pest and Buda by the Germans. Since then they have gained entry to Pest,

⁵⁶ 'A pesti parton zenés kávéházak nyílnak és csuknak, a budai parton gesztenyefák'. Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁷ 'De nem specializálom magam ifjúságilag egy városrészhez, mert nincsen olyan része Budapestnek, ami a számomra ne volna az ifjúság. Ha egyszer el kellene hagynom a Várost, valami szörnyű szétszórás következtében, ami úgy látszik hozzátartozik a fajtam sorsának ritmusához, aznap megöregednék, mint a heisterbachi szerzetes'. Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁸ 'Uram, nem is képzelem, milyen gazdag ez a város lehetőségekben'. Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁹ 'A Duna igen régi folyó, és előreláthatólag még igen sokáig fog folyni, viszont a költők életét többé-kevésbé rövide mérték párkai kezek, talán ezért jutott eszükbe a Dunáról a mulandóság'. Ibid., p. 65.

after which they migrated in waves to Buda. No Jews live in Óbuda any more, in fact, the only inhabitant is the hermit essayist, Gábor Halász.

Unlike Ágai's *Utazás, Budapesti kalauz* ventures into the poorer inner-city districts, home to the most recent arrivals and reminiscent of a collection of small, autonomous villages. Józsefváros, the whole of which is available for rent, houses the future generation of Hungary, who refresh their tired minds at night with wine in the various bars. Private life does not exist in the tenements, despite the fact that landlords are never in evidence. In time, every part of the tenant's body becomes a pair of ears, completely absorbed in noting the movements of the subtenant. The guide takes the Martian behind the Vásárcsarnok (Great Market Hall), a secret district known only to him. At dusk it suddenly becomes Paris, with its tiny, filthy coffee houses, shops whence exciting fruit, stew and meat smells emanate; its strange people, with the Danube in the background like the Seine; and everything is lit by the Citadella (the Eiffel Tower). Arguments rage at night on the street between police and passers-by, just as in Paris. This is the district of lost love, indeed the physical size of Kálvin Square is explained by the fact that it has been waiting so long for someone who never showed up.

The last three destinations are middle-class Jewish Új-Lipótváros, Margit Island, home to parks and hotels, and working-class Újpest. First Új-Lipótváros, which, in the narrator's youth, consisted of fenced gardens, and is now home to the most modern *palazzi*, in which young psychoanalysts expose their souls to each other on couches, bridge-playing Amazons daydream in the depths of their snow-white bathrooms, and exceptionally intelligent clerks tune in to Moscow on their radios. 'Everything here is modern and simple and objective and the same'.⁶⁰ The reality here is, however, that nobody has any money. Margit Island is where the greatest poet of the *pestiek*, János Arany, who did not like Pest, retreated into his village like a great Indian chief and wrote bitter verse. But the people of Pest were, and are, fonder of the city than of him:

⁶⁰ 'Minden modern és egyszerű és tárgyilagos és egyforma itt'. Ibid., p. 70.

In it they see their own life-styles clarified. János Arany was also sober and hard-working; he also liked money and to be left alone, just like the people of Pest. Sir, do not believe the journalists. The Pest man is honest and trustworthy, and János Arany is his poet, the most conscientious Hungarian poet.⁶¹

Last is Újpest, home to factory workers who must watch over the terrible machines; otherwise the machines would escape to the arterial roads and devour their puny owners. But a cheery, village-like atmosphere reigns outside the factory after the shift. The girls' simplicity conceals their secret, that their souls are like an atom which cannot be split with romantic words. 'I am afraid of them, and on evenings full of longing, I think of their large, unattractive hands. The far side ... Buda is the far side, but the farthest of all is still Újpest'.⁶² The narrator then bids a fond farewell to the Martian, who has been looking at his watch.

Budapesti kalauz is, like *Utazás*, both love letter to and exoneration of the author's home town. But Szerb's Guide is more detached, and the fragments of Budapest remain more isolated from one another than they do in Ágai's *Utazás*. Money, on the rare occasions when it can be found, is cherished by those who enjoy it, because its existence is so precarious. Everywhere else the lack of money is tangible. But this is no sick urban body, no 'unnatural setting for the anonymous interaction of an alienated population'.⁶³ The disparate districts have in common only the fact that the city itself is heterogeneous, imperial, Catholic, Jewish, German and Hungarian. As with Ágai, there is no speculation on the thoughts and emotions of Budapest residents, because none is needed: people do what they can to get by regardless of where and how they live. Szerb's Budapest is a city in need of understanding and mindful appreciation, something not difficult to achieve if one disregarded the over-heated rhetoric of 'journalists'.

⁶¹ 'Benne megtisztulva látják a saját életformájukat. Arany János is józan volt és dolgoz, ő is szerette a pénzt és hogyha békében hagyják, mint a pestiek. Uram, ne higgyen az újságíróknak. A pesti ember becsületes és megbízható, és Arany János a költője, a leglelkiismeretesebb magyar költő'. Ibid., p. 71.

⁶² 'Félek tőlük, és vágyódó éjszakákon nagy, nem szép kezükre gondolok. A túlsó part ... Buda a túlsó part, de az igazi túlsóság mégis Újpest'. Ibid., p. 72.

⁶³ John Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 44.

Grand Café Budapest, 1936: All Life is Here (Lajos Nagy)

Written and published in 1936 during the last months of Gyula Gömbös's premiership, *Budapest nagykávéház*⁶⁴ (Grand Café Budapest) is Lajos Nagy's close study of the interplay between public and private in that microcosm of urban life, the coffee house. The novel was well received by critics, although one Communist Party member accused Nagy of antisemitism.⁶⁵ Nagy had cut all ties with the Communist Party in that year, and this work confirmed his disillusion with party politics, if not with humanity as a whole. Few non-Jews had done more to mock the nonsense that Jews were responsible for all the ills of Hungarian society, though Nagy was not interested in speaking on behalf of Jews *per se*, but rather on behalf of those abused and insulted by society.⁶⁶ *Budapest nagykávéház*, like his portrait of a fictitious village *Kiskunhalom* (1934), presented a closed world over a finite period of time in order to shed light on wider social processes and injustices: 'In one drop of water is the whole world, in one coffee house the entire capitalist social system'.⁶⁷ The Populists had heralded *Kiskunhalom* as a work of great literary and political value. It had been inspired by Nagy's return to his place of birth, Apostag in southern Hungary, whereas *Budapest nagykávéház* was a eulogy to the café at the centre of Nagy's world and, as such, was too decadent for either Populists or Communists to endorse as a literary manifesto:

I am a man of the café. I spent half my life, three-quarters of my waking hours in the café. And I do not regret it. It is a joy to sit in the window and look out, to gaze at life from a protected place, as it were, to touch the girls, to stroke their faces, to feel their bottoms, but only through the glass and

⁶⁴ Lajos Nagy, *Budapest nagykávéház*, Budapest, Nyugat, 1936, reprinted in Lajos Nagy, *A vademeter. Budapest nagykávéház. Három boltoskisasszony*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1981, pp. 115-293.

⁶⁵ Gergely Sándor wrote in *Párizsi munkás* (Parisian worker) in 1936 that *Három magyar város* (Three Hungarian Towns, 1932), *Kiskunhalom* and *Budapest nagykávéház* were antisemitic. See Judit Kónya, *Nagy Lajos*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1980, p. 181.

⁶⁶ 'Igazában nem a zsidókért, hanem a bántalmazott emberért beszélek'. Lajos Nagy cited in Tamás Tarján, *Nagy Lajos*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1980, p. 73.

⁶⁷ 'Egy vízcseppben benne van az egész világ, egy kávéházban az egész kapitalista társadalmi rend'. Lajos Nagy, 'A kávé', *Vörös Lobogó*, 1919, cited in Tarján, *Nagy Lajos*, p. 178.

with one's eyes [...] The café is a pleasure and also a narcotic, because it arouses love of life.⁶⁸

Nagy neither courted nor enjoyed official approval after 1948, despite his reputation as one of Hungary's most formidable socialist writers; he was a trouble-maker and *bon viveur* who frequently 'advertised his powerful appetite for steaks and women and his need for cash to buy them'.⁶⁹

The bourgeois public sphere, according to the theory of Jürgen Habermas, originated in the eighteenth-century coffee house, where newspapers were read and current affairs discussed. Habermas identifies three characteristics of the public sphere: universal access, rational debate, and disregard of social rank.⁷⁰ In Budapest coffee houses, however, the poor were excluded, discussions of current affairs appear to have been motivated by the desire to hear one's own voice, and social rank was paramount (and, if necessary, faked). Nagy's café patrons are more reminiscent of Georg Simmel's city-dwellers who, in the desire to assert difference from others, are 'tempted to adopt the most tendentious peculiarities, that is, the specifically metropolitan extravagances of mannerism, caprice, and preciousness'.⁷¹ The world of *Budapest nagykvéház* is no different from that in Ludwig Hirschfeld's 1927 anti-Baedeker guide to Vienna or in Egon Erwin Kisch's 1930 essay 'Wir gehen ins Café, weil ...'.⁷² Nagy's work constitutes a record of the lives of the patrons of one coffee house on the Nagykörút (Grand Boulevard) and their perceptions of events taking place within and beyond the four walls of this, their second (and in some cases only) home, between 3 July and 4

⁶⁸ Cited in Albert Tezla, 'Introduction' in Lajos Nagy, *Authoring, Barbering and Other Occupations: Selected Short Stories*, Budapest, Corvina, 2002, pp. 7-23 (pp. 12-13).

⁶⁹ Paul Igotus, 'Radical Writers in Hungary', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1, 1966, 2, pp. 149-67 (p. 154).

⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, Cambridge, Polity, 1989.

⁷¹ Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, pp. 47-60 (p. 57).

⁷² 'We in Europe [...] have the beloved coffee house, without which, in my opinion, one cannot live. If one is in a German city, one needs to telephone friends, with whom one makes an appointment in a coffee house, and thus the wheel of intellectual or social conversation comes full circle. The coffee house spares us from an apartment, which one does not necessarily need to have, if there is a coffee house'. Egon Erwin Kisch, 'Wir gehen ins Café, weil ...' reprinted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (eds), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1994, p. 423.

August 1936. In the opening paragraph, the narrator imagines what the Earth must look like from outer space. Gazing down upon the continents, countries, cities and streets, he finally settles on the Budapest coffee house where, he claims, all life is present:

Here, one must understand that whether one is in a geographically insignificant small circle; this circle extends to the whole city, the whole country, the whole world. In that small circle [...] is the whole world. The components of this small circle contain the whole world and all its properties. The whole world is also in the Budapest coffee house. Every occurrence [in the wider world] also goes on in here, because here [the wider world] is observable, almost tangible.⁷³

Nagy dispenses with the stock characters of nineteenth-century Hungarian literature (the jolly nobleman or tragic poet) and the figures favoured by most of his contemporaries (the wretched agricultural labourer or boorish landowner) and presents his version of humanity: upper-class whores past their prime; despondent and reactionary bureaucrats whose gullibility knows no bounds; spiteful rich girls; stupid secret policemen; neurotic Jews; frustrated husbands fleeing domestic misery; beggars collecting cigarette butts before being moved on by the police; and angry young men whose only aim in life is to publish an incendiary journal that will change the world. The familiar rogues in this gallery are presented with the cynicism one would expect from Nagy. However, *Budapest nagykávéház* was not just a reiteration of what everyone already knew, that the middle-class denizens of Pest were a lugubrious crowd. Writing about the ordinary lives of ordinary people in extraordinary times was, in effect, the realisation of Ignóty's declaration of the right of the city man to express himself in Hungarian literature.⁷⁴

The explicit reference to the whole of humanity in the opening paragraph indicates two things to the reader. First, the mindless chatter in a Budapest coffee house is as valid as any other exchange of words; and second, regardless of

⁷³ 'Itt – ezt úgy kell érteni, hogy ott ugyan, ahol az ember éppen van, földrajzilag egy csékely kis körben, de az egész városra, az egész országra, az egész világra kihatóan. Abban a kis körben [...] benne van az egész világ. A kis kör szerves alkatrésze a nagyvilágnak, s annak minden tulajdonságát magában foglalja. A nagyvilág bent van a Budapest kávéházban is. Minden eseménye ott benn is folyik, mert tudomásul vehető, szinte érzékelhető'. Nagy, *Budapest nagykávéház*, pp. 122-23.

⁷⁴ See Ignóty, *Válogatott írásai*, ed. Aladár Komlós, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1969.

occupation, people are stubborn beings who occupy themselves with trivia to blot out the horror of the world around them. With the threat of war in Abyssinia lurking in the background, the characters in *Budapest nagykávéház* do nothing, they just continue complaining about the price of coffee. In fact, nothing much happens in the novel, because Nagy is no longer concerned with heroes or tales, but rather with the passing of time.⁷⁵ The months of July and August are known as the *uborkaszezon* in Hungarian, literally ‘cucumber-season’ or silly season, when the town has emptied and those left behind are at leisure to ponder the meaning of life. Each chapter is structured around the following predictable pattern: the elderly take breakfast; the mid-morning rush is followed by a few dead hours after lunch; and the scramble for evening editions of daily newspapers precedes the appearance of shady underworld types, whose presence coincides with the lighting of the gas lamps. The gradual accumulation of detail, snippets of conversations and interior monologues of the patrons provides a distinct rhythm to daily life in the café that resembles a stream of consciousness, interspersed with lucid expressions of despair from both narrator and characters. Nagy is lurking in the background throughout, perhaps seated at the window and reading the papers, observing the tedium of the café and noting the imminence of war.

In *Budapest nagykávéház*, ideologies are compared with street fashions, adopted for reasons of expedience and the desire to conform to the latest season’s trends. The young firebrands in particular are shown to be tiresome and unpleasant self-advertisers who, regardless of political persuasion, argue over the title of their publications before writing a single word. The left-wingers discuss whether their paper should be called ‘Russia’, ‘Red Flag’, ‘In Vladimir’s Footsteps’, ‘Proletarian Fist’, ‘Cyanide’, ‘Revolutionary Front’, or ‘Light from the East’. One of their number suggests ‘Red Tricolour’ to much hilarity. They finally settle on ‘Northern Light’, the suggestion of one individual who ‘last year was still a Social Democrat, the year before that an anarchist, and before that a *l’art-pour-l’artiste* and who, in a few months’ time, will become a Fascist, but it could take at least two years before

⁷⁵ See Endre Illés’s review ‘Két regény. I. Nagy Lajos: Budapest nagykávéház’, *Nyugat*, 6, 1936, online edition (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/human/szepirod/magyar/nyugat/html/tart/22731.htm>).

he becomes a neo-Catholic'.⁷⁶ The radical antisemites at the next table are faced with the dilemma whether to name their paper 'Mace', 'Arrow', 'Plough', 'Magyars', 'Magyar Insurrection', 'For the Homeland', 'Tricolour', or 'National Flag', before eventually settling on 'Spear'. None of the burgeoning revolutionaries has any money, and so cadge money from friends and relations to pay for publication, as Nagy himself had done in 1921 when nobody would touch *Találkozásaim az antiszemizmussal* (My Encounters with Antisemitism), a series of 'skits on the Jew-baiters of the day, including the military. [It] was printed in 1,200 copies, and has been out of print since; Jews bought it up, in charitable haste, and with a view to having it disappear'.⁷⁷ In the popular imagination of the café, only Jews have money. Nobody knows how everybody else apparently survives on nothing, and in the absence of financial solvency, the patrons behave in a lordly fashion, hectoring the waiters for pineapple jam and observing one another for the slightest hint of personal tragedy. They scan the newspapers for items of interest and, finding nothing but the tedious threat of war, complain instead about the likelihood of a forced move to the countryside. Not one editorial or opinion piece is taken seriously by the newspaper readers, who remain stubbornly addicted to the printed word. The eternally vexed manager, Mr Trauer, particularly resents the reading tastes of his patrons. In addition to the national and international dailies and weeklies, he has been cajoled into subscribing to *Üdvösség* ('Salvation', or 'Beatitude'), a Catholic weekly favoured by Jews, and *Figyelünk benneteket* ('We Listen To You'), earnest rubbish popular among the competing gangs of scribblers. The incorrigible Trauer's disapproval is compounded by that new and inexplicable fad of 'weekending', which takes people out of the city and away from his café. Indeed for everyone inside, the world beyond the walls of the Café Budapest is nothing more than a source of frustration and annoyance.

As one might expect, the angry young men are particularly underwhelmed by what they read, despairing at the dearth of poetry in the market of ideas. For

⁷⁶ '... aki tavaly még szociáldemokrata volt, két évvel ezelőtt anarchista, azelőtt l'art pour l'artista, s hónapok múlva lesz csak fasiszta, addig pedig, hogy neokatolikussá váljon, még két év is eltelhet'. Nagy, *Budapest nagykvéház*, p. 129.

⁷⁷ Paul Ignotus, 'Radical Writers in Hungary', p. 152.

them, even sex is a repulsive bourgeois habit which will be swept away by the Revolution, leaving only Nagy and one András Bakó to contemplate girls' bottoms. A civil servant whose wife has returned to her family in another of Nagy's creations, the small Danubian town of Harpacskószajudár, Bakó spends his hours in the café thinking fond thoughts of Mussolini, whom he admiringly refers to as 'Il Duce', and quietly fuming at the liberal press. He lends two pengő to a poet-scrounger, László Dévay, and then returns daily expecting repayment from him, but he continually fails to show up. Bakó nurses his resentment and loneliness until Mrs Dobosi, a *törzstündér* ('*habitué* fairy') of the café comes to his aid. She is overweight, but clean and affordable. There is no love between men and women in the café. Mrs Dobosi trades on the memory of her beauty; an unnamed single woman tries and fails to write a novel; and the appalling Sachs sisters inflict terror on all. They are Anna, Nelli and Baby, scrounging spinster, happily married snob, and anorexic divorcee respectively. All three pour scorn on men who attempt to gain their affections. They are the female counterparts to the angry young men, slaves to fashion and convinced of their superiority. Baby declares: 'Well, I for one shall never beg. I shall always live well. Because I have standards, and I have a brain, so I may meet my standards. I have cultural standards, but not those of the prole or peasant. I have to have a comfortable flat, fine underwear and a fashionable hat. I have a right to a bathroom'.⁷⁸

As the summer wears on the heat becomes oppressive, tempers are frayed, takings drop, and the overall level of hypochondria increases. The headache afflicting Mr Schwarz becomes a source of suffering for all. The pain initially appears to have been brought about by eating vegetables whose names begin with a particular letter. Schwarz's friends offer unhelpful advice until it transpires that he has a brain tumour, something they then claim to have known all along. *Budapest nagykávéház* draws to a close on 3 August, 1936. The heat in the café is unbearable.

⁷⁸ 'Na, hát én sohasem fogok koldulni. Én mindig jól fogok élni. Mert nekem igényeim vannak, és van eszem, hogy az igényeimet ki tudjam elégíteni. Nekem kultúrigényeim vannak, nem úgy, mint egy prolinak vagy parasztnak. Nekem kell a kényelmes lakás, a szép szoba, finom fehérnemű és a divatos kalap. Nekem jogom van egy fürdőszobára'. Nagy, *Budapest nagykávéház*, p. 179.

Politicians met behind closed doors, and when they stepped out from the rooms, they had themselves photographed in various poses. Compulsory killings went on everywhere. The same old torments, threats, storms and outbreaks of fire. Some boats sank, some airships went up in flames, some aeroplanes crashed. Family members nursed grudges against each other, indeed, they hated each other; poets disparaged each others' works. Anonymous complaints were received by the authorities about those for whom life was good, and who had walked around in public with a cheerful disposition. It so happened that one and the same person was informed upon in twenty different places at once: in Moscow, he was a bourgeois element; in Ireland he was a Protestant; in Mexico he was a Catholic priest; in Italy he was a pacifist; in Germany he was a communist; in Japan he was Chinese; and in Budapest he had been seen recently with a ten pengő note on his person.⁷⁹

On this last day, newspapers report on the legions of women who have occupied the streets, an army of prostitutes offending the morals of nearby schoolchildren and their parents. The author of this particular piece sits alone in the café, crying onto the marble table, while his neighbours discard his printed opinions and complain instead about the infernal heat. The patrons remain resolutely unmoved by world events, because the café is their link to and shelter from the outside world, a safe place from which to socialise and moralise. The narrator, who begins his observations from outer space, sees humanity united in its suffering. There is a parallel here with *Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára*, in which the city is explained to the extra-terrestrial. By 1936, Nagy was 'no longer irritated by the lonely ambling of the petty bourgeois, but lets him run, gazing after him with something like curiosity'.⁸⁰ The mature Nagy had given up satirising the pseudo-science of racism and had lost faith in the writer's ability to make a difference.⁸¹

⁷⁹ 'A politikusok zárt ajtók mögött tanácskoztak, s mikor kiléptek a termekből, különféle pózokban lefotografáltatták magukat. A kötelező gyilkosságok mindenütt megtörténtek. Ugyanúgy a kínzások, fenyegetések, a viharok, a tűzvészek. Egy-egy hajó elsüllyedt, egy léghajó kigyúlt, s néhány repülőgép lezuhant. A családtagok acsakodtak egymásra, sőt sajnos gyűlölték egymást; a költők ócsárolták az egymás műveit. Akinek jól ment a dolga, s aki derűs tekintettel járt a nyilvánosság előtt, az ellen névtelen följelentések érkeztek a hatóságokhoz. Megtörtént, hogy egy és ugyanazon embert egyszerre húsz helyen jelentették fel: Moszkvában, hogy burzsoá érzelmű; Írországbán, hogy protestáns; Mexikóban, hogy katolikus pap; Olaszországban, hogy pacifista; Németországban, hogy kommunista; Japánban, hogy kínai; Budapesten, hogy valaki a napokban egy tízpengőst látott nála'. Ibid., p. 289.

⁸⁰ 'Nem, a Budapest nagykávéház íróját már nem irritálja a magányosan bandukoló kispolgár. Futni hagyja, s amint utána néz, szinte kíváncsi is rá'. Endre Illés, 'Két regény', see footnote 75.

⁸¹ The two volumes of Nagy's autobiography were titled *A lázadó ember* (The Rebellious Man, 1883-1914) and *A menekülő ember* (The Fugitive Man, 1914-34).

Fifteen years earlier during the White Terror he had been at his busiest, producing short stories and sketches at a furious rate. His *Képtelen természetrajz* of 1921⁸² spared nobody in its ridicule. Each sketch presented an animal with remarkably human characteristics, including the ostrich, pig, lion, parrot and Jew:

The Jew's physique is longish and round; his height varies from between 150 and 190 centimetres, from little Kohn to the dromedary Jakab. His girth is occasionally wider. The Jew has rounded shoulders, sticking-out ears and bandy legs and if he does not, then he is cheating. Because the Jew's favourite racial trait is cheating, nowadays we see more straight-legged and normal-eared Jews than bandy-legged ones. Legal intervention is required in this area.⁸³

The Budapest of *Budapest nagykávéház* is populated by disillusioned men and women who have retreated to the coffee house, their only remaining source of freedom, and their last point of refuge from financial crises and the threat of war. There is none of the sentimentality of Ágai's *Utazás* and Nagy, true to partisan form, is clearly addressing his compatriots, not visitors from outer space. What distinguishes *Budapest nagykávéház* primarily, however, is its presentation of the city as a microcosm, the world in miniature. The outside world is distinctly absent from the two earlier guides, because *Utazás* shows the evolution of the city becoming Hungarian, and *Budapesti kalauz* describes parts of a city in terms of the emotions they invoke. Nagy's Budapest is a defiantly hedonistic and nescient Central European milieu in spite of its convenient location for large European wars.

⁸² See footnote 48.

⁸³ 'A zsidó termete hosszúkás és kerek, magassága egy méter és ötven centi és egy méter kilencven centi közt váltakozik, már aszerint, amint a kis Kohnról, vagy a dromedár Jakabról van szó. Szélessége néhe ennél is több. A zsidó válla csapott, fülei elágózók, lábai karikásak, amelyiké nem, az csal. Mivel pedig a zsidónak kedvenc faji szokása a csalás, manapság már több egyenes lábú és szabályos fülű zsidót látunk, mint görbelábút. Törvényhozási intézkedésre van e tekintetben is szükség'. Lajos Nagy, 'A zsidó' in 'Képtelen természetrajz', Budapest, Kultúra, 1921, reprinted in Nagy, *Válogatott művei*, p. 1197.

Time

In his essay 'Homo palpitans: Balzac's novels and Urban Personality', Franco Moretti argues that in the urban novel, description (a form of classification of high and low, beautifully and ugly, old and new and so on) plays a secondary role to narration. Because what '*distinguishes* the city [...] is that its spatial structure (basically its *concentration*) is functional to the intensification of *mobility*: spatial mobility, naturally enough, but mainly *social* mobility'.⁸⁴ Description is used for those whose time of metamorphosis is over. 'Their future can only duplicate their present: their essence is what they *are*, not what they might become. They will never be objects of a narration, in so far as the latter always and necessarily implies change'.⁸⁵ The social relations of incipient capitalism required novelty and violation of particular rules for narration of the metropolis. Ágai's Budapest characters are exemplary in this respect: they are always becoming something; as are Nagy's coffee house patrons, and even Simmel's metropolitan subjects, who construct ways of coping with the sensory stimulation of the big city, and in the process, become metropolitan themselves.

An acute consciousness of time informed numerous other Budapest short stories, especially those which charted the life of less fashionable districts. The maverick Viktor Cholnoky forayed into the ninth district, Ferencváros, in 'A senkik szigete'⁸⁶ (Island of Nobodies, 1910), which he compared to an island of shipwrecks. Ferencváros was often the first port of call for new immigrants from Galicia, the Balkans and remoter parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Cholnoky noted that few people who were not born or resident there ever strayed into its territory, that district which possessed the strongest city character (*városi karakter*) in Budapest. 'What do I mean by city character? Most simply, the past, which

⁸⁴ Franco Moretti, 'Homo palpitans: Balzac's novels and Urban Personality' in Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer et. al., London, Verso, 1988, pp. 109-129 (p. 111).

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁶ Viktor Cholnoky, 'A senkik szigete', *Tammúz*, Budapest, Franklin, 1910, reprinted in Cholnoky, *Trivulzio szeme*, pp. 269-80.

manifests itself in the stones, the habits and in the air itself'.⁸⁷ This is not the polished, parvenu Nagykörút or Andrassy Street, but a meeting place between city, old-fashioned small town, and village. And moreover, the single-storey houses and poor population do not breathe the air of a small Hungarian town, but that of big-city poverty, just like Cheapside in London, Clignancourt in Paris and Kamennii Ostrov in St Petersburg. At the centre of this district is a house which is Budapest's 'island of nobodies'. There are three types of nobody: the first ran aground here long ago, always was and always will be a nobody; the second used to be a somebody; and the third is he who will become a somebody as a result of being washed up here. Physically and mentally, the inhabitants of Ferencváros are still peasants; they and the entire district subconsciously follow the rhythms of village life.

Writing at around the same time, the American sociologist Robert Park proposed that the

processes of segregation establish moral distances which make the city a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate. This makes it possible for individuals to pass quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another and encourages the fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in several contiguous, but other widely separate, worlds.⁸⁸

The majority of less well-off individuals rarely passed from one moral milieu to another as a matter of course, but remained in their districts of residence and instead resembled the 'ethnic villager' of Herbert Gans's work on the West End of Boston in the 1960s. 'Ethnic villagers' were those who lived to a certain extent as they had done in their villages of origin, and whose way of life was based around 'kinship and the primary group, the lack of anonymity and secondary-group contacts, the weakness of formal organisations, and the suspicion of anything and

⁸⁷ 'Hogy mit érték városi karakter alatt? Legrövidebben úgy mondhatnám meg, hogy a múltat, amely kifejeződik a kövekben, a szokásokban és magában az egész levegőben'. Cholnoky, 'A senkik szigete', p. 269.

⁸⁸ Robert Park, 'The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment' [1916], originally published in *American Journal of Sociology*, xx, 1916, reprinted in Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, pp. 91-130 (p. 126).

anyone outside their neighbourhood'.⁸⁹ The nobodies of Ferencváros are largely oblivious to the rest of the city, suspended in temporal purgatory. Nightlife, in Cholnoky and in Szerb's murky 'Parisian' quarter, takes place away from the affluent centre: in Hungarian literature, pub brawls always take place in poor inner-city districts and outlying slums.

The tempo of Kálvin Square in Géza Csáth's essay 'Kálvin Square' is dictated by its location on a crossroads, bordering the Belváros on one side and the northern end of Ferencváros on the other.⁹⁰ Csáth begins by reminding the reader that one 'should know that cities do not have one heart, as people do, but more than one, like reptiles and some fish'.⁹¹ He charts one day in the life of the square, on a cold and misty winter morning, observing the first weak heartbeats of the awakening city. Day begins in the café, with bread and dripping, grape-skin brandy and a cigarette, while trams and their headlights break up the fog and occupy the previously empty space. Shops open, clean and fresh for the day's trading, and a large group of workers comes down Üllői Road and head for the bridge for work. Young seamstresses on Baross Street, poor and cheerfully loud, ignore the remarks of young university students who will realise one day that one should not get up so early just for women. Nobody hears the church clock strike noon. The quiet of the afternoon and then night is only interrupted by revellers returning home through the chill mists after a hard day's work and a hard night's revelry. People and square exist in a temporal symbiosis, rather like the daily pattern established in Nagy's coffee house.

Jenő Rejtő, the author of surreal detective novels under the pseudonym P. Howard, chose the Nagykörút as his observation point.⁹² This symbol of the world, he claims, is traversed by peoples, poverty and riches as it winds its way through

⁸⁹ Herbert J. Gans, 'Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Reevaluation of Definitions', reprinted from Herbert J. Gans, *People, Places and Policies*, New York, Columbia University Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1991, in Philip Kasinitz (ed.), *Metropolis: Centre and Symbol of Our Times*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995, pp. 170-95 (p. 174).

⁹⁰ Géza Csáth, 'Kálvin téren' (1908), reprinted in Erki (ed.), *A hajdani hangos Budapest*, pp. 91-6.

⁹¹ 'A városoknak tudniillik nem egy szívük van, mint az embereknek, hanem több, mint a hullőknek és némely halaknak'. Ibid., p. 91.

⁹² Jenő Rejtő, 'Nagykörút' (1930), reprinted in Erki (ed.), *A hajdani hangos Budapest*, pp. 111-13.

Pest. The author returns to Budapest from Milan and finds himself standing on the boulevard, without a friend or a cigarette in the world.

That's why it's good to walk by the familiar cafés here, and to look at the pale, drawn, blasé Pest faces, to listen to familiar words from home, to read Hungarian signs. Someone shouts in surprise in my direction: 'Well, it's you, are you here?' 'Not yet', I say, 'but I could arrive at any moment'.⁹³

Rejtő continues along the street, noting how many smiling women and pale, worn men there are. 'It is also the symbol of a city if there are lots of sweet women smiling on the streets in the evening, and hurrying towards them are many serious men, who visibly suffer from stomach complaints.'⁹⁴ Women, the happy ones, appear to be taking their time, while men are under pressure to satisfy their expectations. And even though this is characteristic of large cities, Budapest is still slower. Without a place to stay or anything to eat, the author is struck by the lack of everything:

Here there are no boulevards roaring with noise in which one can bury oneself away from hunger, no Wagram Napoleon memorials, no Kurfürstendamm Gedächtniskirche, neither Graben nor Stefansturm, Grand Canal, Hermitage. My God, there is so much that is not here, not to mention no happy people. Why did I return? [...] What awaits me here? Where is my place here? What shall I do tomorrow and, more importantly, today? I do not know, but a painful happiness seizes me. It must be a similar feeling to be a mother. I am filled with pain and foreboding, and yet I am still happy; this is Budapest ...⁹⁵

Here, Budapest appears to be permanently dawdling, despite the traffic of people and money. The city promises the author plenitude, but delivers inaccessibility. Once the existence of the private individual in the traditional home had been

⁹³ 'De azért jó itt az ismerős kávéházak mentén járni, a sápadt, elkinzott, blazírt humorú, pesti fejeket nézni, ismerős, hazai szót hallani, magyar cégtáblákat olvasni. Valaki meglepetten felém kiabál: - Hát te, itt vagy? - Még nem - mondom, - de minden pillanatban érkezhetem'. Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁴ 'Ez is szimbólum egy városra nézve, ha sok, kedves nő mosolyog este az utcákon, és evvel szemben rengeteg, komoly és szemmel láthatólag gyomorbajos férfi siet'. Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁵ 'És itt nincsenek robajos boulevard-ok, amelyekbe bele lehet temetkezni az éhség elől, itt nincs Wagram Napoleon emlékkal, nincs Kurfürstendamm Gedächtniskirche, még Graben sincs és Stefansturm, Grand Canal, Ermitage. Én istenem, mennyi minden nincs itt, nem is szólva a boldog emberektől. Miért jöttem én ide vissza? [...] Mi vár itt rám, mi helyem van itt, mit csinállok holnap és főképpen ma? Nem tudom, de fájdalmas boldogság fog el. Valami hasonló érzés lehet anyának lenni. Fáj és balsejtelemmel tölt el, és mégis boldog vagyok, Budapest ez ...' Ibid., p. 113.

undermined, opportunities arose for ‘various mergers of the individual self and the cityscape’.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The guides through the fragmented city abandoned the quest for a total vision. The overarching motif here was not the familiar rural-urban dichotomy, within which Budapest’s position was immutable, but a city which was disparate, elusive and heterogeneous. ‘With the opposition of city and countryside displaced onto the city itself, it is small wonder that its inner divisions became ever more apparent’.⁹⁷ The narratives of the city are all shaped by a consciousness of the passing of time, and the plural nature of the city. The problem for both author and reader is whether one can make a whole from the disparate parts of the city, and the guides through the city resolve this by proposing that the very disparity of Budapest is what constitutes and characterises the whole.

The nostalgia is not of the pessimistic variety. In other words, there is no suggestion ‘that we live in a world which lacks moral unity, in which [...] direct expression of feeling is no longer possible, because need and desire have been rendered artificial and superficial by the spread of a consumer culture which exploits false needs’.⁹⁸ Nostalgia, instead, references the author’s past experiences in and of Budapest. In all the guides, places, institutions and even times of day recall memories, but this is not presented as a disintegration of the self or of the individual’s connection to a wider collective as consequences of urban civilisation. Rather, the journey through the city occurs parallel with the author’s creation of his public persona. The city here is not a metaphor for somehow not being Hungarian, but for an individual and collective process of discovery.

⁹⁶ See Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes*, pp. 8, 21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁹⁸ Georg Stauth and Bryan Turner, *Nietzsche’s Dance: Resentment, Reciprocity, and Resistance in Social Life*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988, p. 32.

These were not ultra-modernist experiments that had dispensed with narrative consequence (such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* [1922], or John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* [1925]), and despite the presence of Budapest slang, neither were they attempts to render the fragmented city through deconstructions of language. They were biographies of the city as autobiographies of the writers. The trope of Budapest as metaphor for greed, materialism and corruption was well-established by the turn of the century, and the guide through the city represented something of an attempt to reclaim the individual's right to the city. In the words of Pál Ignóty, the chief anti-Populist ideologue in the 1930s, 'I began to realise that one only feels at home in everything when one is alone [...] I love the city because I love the individual'.⁹⁹

In the next chapter, I shall turn to portrayals of the city's gender divisions.

⁹⁹ 'A várost én azért szeretem, mert a magányt szeretem'. Pál Ignóty cited in András Bozóki, 'Ignóty Pál és kora' in Pál Ignóty, *Vissza az értelemhez*, pp. 287-311 (p. 289).

Chapter Three

The Gendered City:

Relations between Men, Women and Morality

Introduction

Budapest at the turn of the twentieth century offered men and women an environment in which they could, with a certain amount of luck and privilege, reinvent themselves and their sexual relations. Like any European city of the time, the Hungarian capital boasted a rich variety of seedy cabarets, brothels and venereal diseases alongside a stifling set of morals relating to all things sexual. Private debauchery or personal misery was glossed over with a veneer of public respectability.¹ Sexual difference was placed at the centre of many theories of modern life. Central Europeans maintained rigid notions of sexual difference, but at the same time were fascinated by the blurring of gender boundaries: 'Woman represented feeling, sexuality, and even chaos; man was rationality and control. Some valued the excess of experience to which femininity opened the way; some writers developed a vision of the possible harmony between the gender opposites; for others femininity was threatening, and the antagonism between female sensuality and male intellect an eternal source of conflict and threat'.² The other concept which informed understandings of society was race. *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1902) by Otto Weininger sold like hotcakes throughout Europe because it pandered to fears of the 'feminisation' and 'judaisation' of society. Weininger excoriated the nascent women's movement, dissected 'Jewish' sexuality, and reinforced popular, confused, notions of Aryan male supremacy and rationality.

Women have no existence and no essence; they are not, they are nothing [...] Woman has no share in ontological reality, no relation to the thing-in-itself, which is the deepest interpretation, is the absolute, is God. Man in his highest form, the genius, has such a relation, and for him the absolute is either the conception of the highest form of existence, in which case he is a

¹ 'The nation protected the ideal of beauty from the lower passions of man and helped transform it into a symbol of self-control and purity. The national stereotype and the middle class stereotype were identical'. George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, New York, Howard Fertig, 1985, p. 16.

² Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, Berkeley and Los Angeles CA, University of California Press, 1992, p. 87.

philosopher; or it is the wonderful fairy land of dreams, the kingdom of absolute beauty, and then he is an artist.³

Weininger put forward two types of male Jewish sexuality: the first characterised by a surplus of sensuality and lust unchecked by morality or rationality; the second was a deficit model according to which the Jew was emasculated, less virile than the Gentile. Both types suggested feminine characteristics in the Jew: hysteria in the former, and weakness in the latter. His words received an enthusiastic reception from budding philosopher-kings in Hungary, too, those preoccupied with the depersonalisation of the individual in modern industrial society. Furthermore, the notion of 'nerves', the modern malady *par excellence*, enjoyed popularity from the turn of the century onwards.⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche had pointed out in *Menschliches, allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human, 1879) that 'the whole burden of culture has become so great that there is a general danger of the over-stimulation of the nervous and thinking capacity, so much so that the cultured classes in the European countries are completely neurotic and almost all of their great families have a relative on the brink of madness'.⁵ The link between profligacy and nervous disorders was finally turned on its head by Sigmund Freud, who argued that civilised morality itself, the double standard, was the major cause of mental illness.⁶

Hungarian writers, like their German-speaking contemporaries, were also concerned with the noxious effects of capitalism upon the well-being of the individual and the national body. Still shackled to the idealised Hungarian national character shaped by the nobility (ownership of land, rule over an army of serfs, servants and livestock, the pursuits of horse breeding, racing and hunting, and a career in officialdom), those who busied themselves with questions of identity and personality were obliged to do so under the long-standing assumption that

³ Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*, London, Heinemann, 1906, p. 286. The original German work was first published in 1902.

⁴ Jacques le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, trans. Rosemary Morris, Cambridge, Polity, 1983, p. 39.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and New York, de Gruyter, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 204.

⁶ See Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, Vol. 2, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

manufacturing, trade, speculation, banking and business pursuits in general did not benefit the Magyar.⁷ “‘Is perfidious trade suitable for a Hungarian?’ asked Lőrinc Orczy in the final quarter of the eighteenth century, and the answer was obviously no, since it was the source of all “moral distortion” [...] Even prominent writers and scholars declared that Hungarians lacked the spirit of business, enterprise, and speculation, not only in the stock-exchange sense but in the philosophical one too’.⁸ This ideal of an unchanging Hungarian national character, inspired by the fanciful notion of a patriotic hunting-shooting-fishing sort untroubled by the passage of history, enjoyed a long life in Hungary. The impoverished lesser nobility and gentry had cheerfully ignored Count Széchenyi’s calls in the 1830s to broaden their mental and occupational horizons in order to circumvent their own inevitable bankruptcy: ‘[they] will not be saved from debasement unless our legislation sees to the establishing of institutions that open up access for our landless noble youth to other sources of wealth’.⁹ The impoverished gentry kept the fires of self-regard burning well after the Great War, referring to themselves as the ‘Christian genteel middle class’ or the ‘historic middle class’, preserving the avowed aversion to commerce while expecting prominent positions in the civil service. Géza Paikert noted that in order ‘to conceal their own weak-heartedness and indolence, they successfully propagated the absurd nonsense that it was a gentlemanly job to work as a clerk in the tax office, while being an entrepreneur or a merchant was unsuitable for Hungarians’.¹⁰ The natural environment for the Hungarian then, according to this formidable mythology, is a rural environment

⁷ See Hanák, ‘The Image of the Germans and Jews in the Hungarian Mirror of the Nineteenth Century’.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 52-3. See also Zsolt Beöthy, *A magyar irodalom kistükre*, Budapest, Athaneum, 1896; Károly Pékár, *A magyar nemzeti szépről. A magyar génusz esztétikája*, Budapest, Modern Tudomány, 1906; and essays in Szekfü (ed.). *Mi a magyar?*. Literary portrayals of the disdain for commerce were provided by, for example, Pál Gyulai in *Egy régi udvarház utolsó gazdája* (1857), Kálmán Mikszáth in *A Noszty fiú esete Tóth Marival* (1906-07) and Zsigmond Móricz in *Úri muri* (1928).

⁹ István Széchenyi, 13 March 1839, in *Hírlapi cikkei*, ed. by Antal Zichy, Vol. 1, Budapest, n.p., n.d., p. 225, cited and translated in Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust*, Washington DC, New York and Oxford, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 12.

¹⁰ Géza Paikert, *Ahogy egy magyar a magyart látja*, Budapest, n.p., 1942, p. 11, cited and translated in Zsigmond Pál Pach, ‘Business Mentality and the Hungarian National Character’ in Banac and Verdery (eds), *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, pp. 83-101 (p. 95).

where men are men, women are women, everyone knows their proper place and one can be at peace with one's self and race.

It becomes clear quite quickly that Budapest, if it stood for materialism, restlessness and parvenus, was alien to this worldview. Membership of the middle class was oversubscribed, with impoverished nobility, gentry, Jews and Germans competing for jobs and prestige in the city. According to the 1910 census, 48.9% of doctors, 45.2% of lawyers and 37.2% of engineers were Jewish.¹¹ It was not so much the over-representation of Jews in the professions that raised conservative, neo-conservative¹² and later Populist hackles, but the fact that non-Jewish Hungarians had not created a middle-class territory and urban centre they could call their own. And, more often than not, the blame for this usurpation of the Hungarian capital was laid at the feet of the Hungarians themselves, that sleepy race who had no talent for free competition. As the Admiral said to the Führer:

Hungary generally has many difficulties with the Jews, since two hundred thousand more of them live in Hungary, which is a small country, than in Germany ... Hungary herself is to blame for this situation, for the Hungarians have held for a thousand years that it was not becoming for a nobleman to deal with money and they had their business and finance done by Armenians, Greeks, and finally by Jews. This is why the Jews have played such a great role in Hungary. There are not even enough Hungarian economists to replace them.¹³

The reasoning behind this desire for a Christian, genteel and professional middle class, and by extension capital city, is, of course, entirely contradictory. On the one hand the Hungarian capital, seat of finance, commerce and mass media, cannot by definition be truly Magyar, to such an extent that the notion of a Hungarian city seems oxymoronic; yet it is also unpalatable that people with an alleged innate understanding of capitalism and innovation beat you to all the best jobs, for which you are anyway psychologically unsuited. It was against this mix of sex, race theory and respectability that Hungarian writers began, a little later than their

¹¹ Kovács, *Liberal Professions*, p. 17.

¹² A term coined to describe the right-wing Catholic revival in politics from the mid-1890s onwards by Miklós Szabó in 'Új vonások a századfordulói magyar konzervatív politikai gondolkodásban', *Századok*, 108, 1974, 1, pp. 3-63.

¹³ Miklós Horthy to Hitler in Klessheim, 16 April 1943, cited in György Ránki (ed.), *Hitler hatvannyolc tárgyalása 1939-1944*, vol. 2, Budapest, n.p., 1983, pp. 82-3, reprinted and translated in Pál Pach, 'Business Mentality', p. 83.

western European counterparts, to deal with new relations and forms of love in the city.

New writers and writing

New forms of literature accompanied urbanisation. The careers of the first generation of native Budapest writers (Kiss, Bródy, Molnár et al.) developed with the city itself, and in particular the rise of journalism as a profession.¹⁴ Although many Budapest journalists reported from Parliament, occasionally from the provinces, and translated all the latest news and literary texts from Germany and France, they tended not to strive for objectivity, and were loath merely to repeat facts. In particular *feuilletons* (columns) were written to ‘render a state of feeling [into] a mode of formulating a judgement. Accordingly, in the *feuilleton* writer’s style, the adjectives engulfed the nouns, their personal tint virtually obliterated the contours of the object of discourse’.¹⁵

The display of feeling was extended, by some, into an urban form of *Lokalpatriotismus*, a reformulation of Hungarian-ness created by and tailored for the modern reader. Molnár writes the following in ‘Pestet szeretni’ (To Love Pest):

Those gentlemen who deny the Hungarian identity of Budapest forget that when a small area of land heeds the call to become the capital of that country, it immediately enters the ranks of all international capitals. This is not written anywhere, but it becomes common knowledge and maintains its existence by creating and acquiring some ten thousand different and new customs which come about inevitably. It also becomes inevitable to build a stock exchange, to lay trolley-bus tracks, and with all of this it is inevitable that the outward appearance of a city is transformed into that of a capital city. It is this that distinguishes the capital from a village or small town, and which these gentlemen constantly confuse with what is ethnic and national.

¹⁴ See also Chapter 2, footnote 11.

¹⁵ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, p. 9. Another monographer of the Austro-Hungarian turn-of-the-century, William M. Johnston, argues that the Hungarian language itself was responsible for excessive verbiage: ‘The [Hungarian] language does not discipline its users to scrutinise reality. Linguistic flexibility also prompts improvisation: Hungarians have always been excellent at telling tall tales and at disregarding empirical obstacles’. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind*, p. 347.

Among these ten thousand new developments the Hungarian character is not lost but continues to be revealed in the greatness of its language, sentiments, and desires, in the uniforms of the police, in the gypsy music, in architecture, in the everyday little things. But these fine gentlemen see only what they want to see, that here there is no open space, no poplar trees waving in the open breeze, when they begin to say these things, they become angry and full of remorse, and finally I, in my humble self, who love this city and know that it is truly Hungarian, begin to weep.¹⁶

By no means were Budapest writers and journalists never critical of their home town. On the contrary, many of the bleakest depictions of city life came from authors born and raised there. Innovations in form had created a platform for, in the words of Antal Szerb, new formulations of *magyarság* (by Ady and Móricz, for instance), and with the advent of *Nyugat*, Hungarian literature did not become more Western, but 'more deeply and freely Hungarian'.¹⁷

Gender, *flânerie* and corporeal fantasies of the city

To the collection of contested images of Budapest, itself a contested place, was added feminisation. Mikszáth Kálmán (1847-1910) provides one of the earliest representations of the city as a woman in *Galamb a kalitkában* (Dove in the Cage, 1892): 'Our beautiful young capital city, you are just like a young girl at a difficult age. An uncertain creature! You are no longer so naive as to be sweet, and you are not yet mature enough as to be stimulating, whether you put on your long dress, or your everyday short little skirt'.¹⁸ Budapest was an object of desire for male writers, regardless of whether they lusted after the city or wished to redeem her. Portrayals of the city consistently imagined a female place, fragile and beautiful, or coquettish and flirtatious. The nineteenth-century fantasy of male bourgeois

¹⁶ Ferenc Molnár, *Művei*, vol. 12, Budapest, Franklin, 1928, p. 68, cited and translated in Várkonyi, *Ferenc Molnar and the Austro-Hungarian 'Fin-de-siècle'*, pp. 112-13.

¹⁷ 'Az eredmény, melyet a Nyugat szellemi szabadsága legnagyobb képviselőiben létrehozott, nem abból állt, hogy a magyar irodalom nyugatibb lett, hanem hogy mélyebben és szabadabban magyar lett'. Antal Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet* [1934], Budapest, Magvető, n.d., p. 434.

¹⁸ 'Olyan vagy, szép fiatal fővárosunk, mint egy bakfis. Egy bizonytalan lény! Már nem vagy elég naív, hogy kedves légy, s még nem vagy elég kifejlett, hogy ingerlő lehess. Hol fölveszed a hosszú ruhát, hol a köznapi kurta szoknyácskádat'. Mikszáth, *Galamb a kalitkában*, pp. 36-7.

exploration, according to Judith Walkowitz, involved experiencing ‘the city as a whole, the diversity of districts and locations made coherent through the unifying gaze of the male subject. It is also a fantasy of sovereign desire, the male desiring subject freed from social, economic and spatial constraints’.¹⁹ This unifying gaze sought to make sense of the city which seduced its inhabitants and, as the texts that follow will illustrate, often sent them mad with unfulfilled desire, illicit temptation and unrequited love. The appearance of familiar nineteenth-century literary figures such as the actress and domestic servant signalled the arrival of the *femme fatale* alongside her supposed antithesis, the *femme fragile*.²⁰ Not one work discussed here dispenses with either; it seems that women were still cast within the bipolar Madonna/whore mould, a notion few writers could do without when also describing the city. The following is Gyula Krúdy writing on the visit of Emperor Franz Joseph to Budapest for the millennial celebrations of 1896:

Pest threw off her mask of modesty at once and, year after year, put on more and more jewellery [...]. She lifted her once downcast eyes; she was no longer satisfied with gifts of honeyed peanuts, gilded walnuts or students’ refectory fare. She had noticed her own beauty and developing charms; she discovered a new big-city, *gamine* side to herself; this once little wallflower had begun to appreciate herself; and the thrifty old gentleman [Franz Joseph] was vexed to note that demanding cocotte that Pest had become no longer loved him. The naive virgin, who in the 1860s happily imitated the hairdo and slenderness of Queen Elizabeth whom she had seen at the Merchants’ and Artisans’ Ball, had become a wide-mouthed, greedy, unruly woman.²¹

¹⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, London, Virago, 1992, pp. 10.

²⁰ ‘The Lady of Shalott, Marianna, Ophelia – the heroines of the mid-century had been popular because they were the embodiment of altruistic feminine passion. The very sight of [the *femme fatale*’s] virile flesh had made [men] slide into self-forgetful eagerness to die for love. Now woman [in the late nineteenth-century] had become different. No longer the moon of reflected light, she had become the moon of circularity, of uroboric self-sufficiency. Egotistical, self-involved, she no longer cared a hoot for men; all she cared about was herself. And in ceasing to be self-sacrificial, she clearly became destructive of the masculine ego’. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 148.

²¹ ‘Pest egyszerre levetette szerény álcáját, és évről évre több ékszert rakott magára [...], Pest felnyitotta lesütött szemét, és nem elégedett meg többé mézes mogyoróval, aranyfüstös dióval, diákkoszttal. Észrevette szépségét, fejlődő bájait; kibontakozott nagyvárosias gamin-természete; értékelni kezdte magát az egykori penészvirág, és a fukar öregúr mérgeskedve tapasztalta, hogy már nem szereti őt ez a nagyigényű kokottá vált Pest. A szende szűz, aki a hatvanas években boldogan utánózta a kereskedők és iparosok bálján látott Erzsébet királyné hajkoszorúját, karcsúságát – szélesszájú, mohó, féktelen nőszemély lett.’ Gyula Krúdy, ‘Mit látott Vak Béla szerelemben és bánatban?’ [1921] in *Mákvirágok kertje*, Budapest, Magvető, 1961, pp. 243-448 (pp. 339-40).

Sándor Bródy also allocated male and female genders to Buda and Pest respectively, describing the dawn view from the Castle of 'Buda, the old gentleman and his wife, the wanton young bride, Pest'.²² From Bródy to Tormay, drawing the city in such moralistic gendered terms proved irresistible: attributing feminine charm or wiles to Budapest was perhaps just too easy.

Much recent feminist writing on nationalism has emphasised the construction of national time as male and of national space as female.²³ Accordingly, a romantic or erotic attachment to national territory is created through the feminisation of national space, whose borders may be violated and deflowered by invaders. National linear time is then constructed as masculine, where the nation's history, heroes and lineage are male with 'history as an endless sequence of male heroes strung out one after the other, almost like a series of "begats", and producing the impression of the nation as a temporally deep patrilineage'.²⁴ Both nation and gender create physical space as socio-political, where the nation often appears as lover or beloved, and in which the 'homeland becomes the inactive female object of sentiment, while the male subject is the historically acting object'.²⁵ However, one might also consider variations within conceptualised national space, all of which is not the same: the 'homeland' or 'womb' of authentic *magyarság* in Transylvania; the depressed industrial north-east with a high Gypsy population; the Great Plains; Balaton; and the sinful city itself, Budapest. Areas to which greater symbolic importance is attached must be protected by vigilant (male) border guards, hence anxieties over the fragility of Transylvania, and the desire to re-conquer and occupy the capital.

I now turn to four novels that concern the relations between men, women and morality in the city, published between 1900 and 1936.

²² 'A budai vár bástyáról nézem a hajnalt, és abban Budát, az öreg urat és a feleségét, a kikapós menyecskét, Pestet'. See Chapter 1, footnote 55.

²³ See Tamar Mayer (ed.), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, London, Routledge, 2000; and Katherine Verdery, 'From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe', *East European Politics and Societies*, 8, 1994, 2, pp. 225-55.

²⁴ Verdery, 'From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs', p. 241.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

Kóbor's Budapest: Prostitution and Respectability

Described by Kosztolányi as the poet of asphalt, cigar smoke and Budapest,²⁶ Tamás Kóbor (born Adolf Bermann to a poor Jewish family in Pressburg, 1867, died Budapest, 1942) trained as a lawyer before starting his career in journalism in 1890, primarily as a columnist for liberal Budapest dailies. His brother-in-law and the editor of *A Hét*, József Kiss chose the name Tamás Kóbor for him: it is János Arany's Hungarian translation of Tam O'Shanter.²⁷ Despite, or perhaps because of his close friendships with Kiss and the Tisza brothers, he was a shy, retiring man who disliked public attention and shunned an active political role. However, in the 31 May 1925 edition of *Az Újság* he published the former Interior Minister Ödön Beniczky's confession which revealed that the murders of socialist journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó in 1920 had been carried out on Horthy's orders, as a result of which he had to publish anonymously for almost a decade. Kóbor disliked talking about his unhappy home life, and spent most of his time at the Otthon Kör (At Home Circle) of which he was vice-president, playing cards and discussing literature well away from the likes of Herczeg's Scruffs in *Andor és András*. In an interview with the critic and historian Aladár Komlós in 1926 entitled 'Assimilation or preservation of individuality?', Kóbor insisted on his right not to have to speak on the 'Jewish Question':

I do not occupy myself with this question. There are so many other questions, and I do not want to think about it. I do not make statements on it [...] I am a Hungarian citizen, [...] I insist on my rights, and if I do have an opinion on this and other questions, I *manage* these opinions, and I deliberate when and how much I should give away. What for? I wouldn't convince anyone anyway.²⁸

²⁶ 'Ő az aszfalt, a szivarfüst és Budapest költője – írja Kóbor Tamásról [Kosztolányi]'. György Bodnár, 'Útósó' in Tamás Kóbor, *Budapest*, Budapest, 1993, pp. 379-385 (p. 379).

²⁷ Kóbor also wrote under the pseudonyms Semper, Simplex, Iván Joó, Gyula Simon, Monachus, Réveur, Spectator and Caliban for his main employer *Pesti Hírlap*, as well as *A Hét*, *Magyar Újság*, *Magyar Hírlap*, *Vasárnapi Újság*, *Magyar Szalon*, *Literatura*, and Hungarian-language publications in Vienna, Prague, New York and Cleveland, Ohio.

²⁸ 'Ezzel a kérdéssel én nem foglalkozom. Annyi más kérdés van, erről én nem akarok gondolkodni. Nem nyilatkozom róla [...] Én magyar állampolgár vagyok [...] ragaszkodom a jogaimhoz, és ha megvan is a magam véleménye egy s más kérdéstről, én *gazdálkodom* ezekkel a véleményekkel, és

His first major work, *Budapest*, was first serialised in *A Hét* in 1900 and published in book form in 1901 to immediate critical acclaim. The novel was forgotten, however, until it was republished in 1993. Some of the major characters exist solely to prop up the plot. Similarly, the monologues delivered by, in particular, the female characters are a little too heavy in pathos to resemble normal speech, and feel out of place with Kóbor's otherwise subtle style of observation. It depicts an entirely self-contained universe, created, maintained and inhabited solely by the characters, and which exists almost entirely without the need for anonymous streets and public spaces setting the background. There is no overwhelming atmosphere of anomie or loneliness, no transcendental homelessness or rootlessness which yokes city dwellers together in an unhappy, soulless contract of mutual exploitation and dehumanisation. *Budapest* deals with the class and gender relations of a small, disparate group of people drawn together by one man's infidelity and one woman's need to pay the rent.

The novel opens, like Molnár's *Az éhes város*, on Koronaherceg Street, a small street next to the main shopping street, Váci Street. The street is city by day but village by night,²⁹ and provides the initial backdrop for the heroine Éva Dermák's peregrinations through the snobbish world of Pest high society. Éva lives with her widowed mother, and younger sister Sárika and younger brother Jani in semi-poverty, and is the former lover of Miklós Demédy, secretary of state for home affairs and husband to the demented and possessive Olga, whose meddlesome mother he used to bed in secret. Éva must maintain her physical beauty in order to survive ('a beautiful girl in nice shoes can always get credit'³⁰) the vanity fair of Budapest, in which men and women, though constantly preoccupied with each other, voluntarily separate themselves into discrete groups in public. The streets, underneath the surface of which fashion moves like a current on the seabed, and public space in general, are the undisputed territory of women. Even in parliament the representatives spend their time discussing the women

megfontolom, mikor, mennyit mondjak el belőlük. Minek? Úgysem győzők meg senkit'. Tamás Kóbor interviewed by Aladár Komlós, 'Beszélgetések a zsidókérdésről. I. Kóbor Tamás', *Múlt és Jövő*, 3, 1926, pp. 93-4.

²⁹ 'Budapest legfővárosibb és legfalusiasabb utcája ez'. Kóbor, *Budapest*, p. 5.

³⁰ 'Szép leány jó cipőben mindig hitelképes'. Ibid., p. 23.

gazing at them from the galleries. Demédy paces up and down Koronaherceg Street seeking Éva, like a highwayman of the asphalt.³¹ Gullible Englishmen come to Budapest and are ruined, emotionally and financially, by their Hungarian lady-friends. To this impenetrable gender divide Kóbor adds class, contrasting the ‘sad female proletarians of the streets’ standing at tables in one room and the card- and domino-playing men seated in the back room of a downmarket coffee shop, with the opulent Orfeum Club in which runaway Sárika is found inebriated in a back room with empty bottles of champagne and a man called Waldapfel whose interest is in the under-fourteens, for company.

The female characters provide the backbone of the novel and are the purpose of the city itself. Éva is the noble working-class girl who struggles to provide for her family; her mother is the embittered widow; her younger sister who eventually disappears for good is the tragic tomboy; Éva’s acquaintance Mariska Kovácsévics is the flirtatious and superficial prototype ‘it-girl’ with expensive tastes; Mrs Bellág is Jani’s married, middle-aged tutee who taunts the boy with sexual favours to avenge her husband’s apathy; Olga Demédy is the fragile, neurotic rich girl who has no comprehension of the world outside her marriage; and her mother is the scheming aristocrat who, when not entertaining her pet Jews according to the ‘fashionable liberalism of noble circles’,³² tries her best to ruin the lives of her daughter and son-in-law and former lover. Two scenes in particular stand out which, for all their clumsiness, illustrate Kóbor’s radical message. The first is when Olga discovers her husband’s infidelity and is transformed from a whimpering mess into an articulate, angry, and therefore beautiful, woman scorned. She castigates her impassive father and society as a whole for bringing girls up ignorant, so that as sick and weak adults they are married off into a contract they cannot possibly understand, men being the sex-crazed animals that they are.³³ Following a brief bout of adult self-confidence, in which she compares herself to a Don Quixote who realises that the age of chivalry is over but who does not die, she

³¹ ‘Igazi aszfaltbetyár módjára járta útját az államtitkár úr’. Ibid., p. 131.

³² ‘[A]z úri körök divatos liberalizmusa’. Ibid., p. 121.

³³ ‘Hát miért nem tanítjátok meg erre a leányokat? Miért kellett bután és tudatlanul belemenni egy életbe, mely tele van fürtelemmel, utálattal és veszedelemmel? Miért nem mondjátok meg, hogy a házasság baromi állapot, és miért adtok férjhez egy leányt, aki gyöngé és beteg?’ Ibid., p. 337.

returns to her former passive state, and soon after dies giving birth to a daughter, who also dies in turn. The second notable scene takes place shortly before Olga falls pregnant, and features Éva, mourning the death of Jani who had fallen from a railway bridge in despair at the realisation his sister had taken a rich lover and then his money to pay the bills, confronting Miklós and Olga Demédy, in their (naturally) palatial Castle district home. They assume that Éva intends to blackmail them, but instead she berates the rich for their crimes.

‘Jani!’ laughed Éva scornfully. ‘From leaving your room, upon hearing your words, he went straight to the Danube. And you still think that I was merely a necessary affair of your youth and an unnecessary form of entertainment afterwards. The poor pay with their lives for your entertainments. You are rich, distinguished, and for the rich man and distinguished girls to remain respectable, you throw yourselves upon the poor, whom you are not obliged to marry. And you still dare to hold your heads high, and you, your ladyship, you still dare to put on airs and look down on me? You are murderers, murderers, all murderers. Oh, how I despise you! [...] Go out into the street, your ladyship, where you will see thousands of ruined girls, more ruined than me. And all so that you, the rich, may be respectable. [...] You hold honour in high regard, and rejoice more in one weak poor girl than you do in ten honourable [girls]. Men need us, which is why we must be destroyed. And we are being destroyed, tomorrow there will no longer be any poor girls who give birth to poor children’.³⁴

Éva departs after the outburst, and Miklós denies ever getting her pregnant, despite the fact that neither he nor the reader ever knows for sure whether she was or not. The novel closes at the races: Éva has become a successful actress and can provide for her mother, though both still mourn the disappearance of Sárika and Jani’s death. Éva notices a woman taking money from a man’s hand, telling him, ‘this is the easiest way’, at which everyone laughs. The man is Miklós Demédy, and Éva

³⁴ ‘A Jani! – kacag gúnyosan Éva. – Az ön szobájából, az ön szavát hallva, egyenesen nekiment a Dunának. És ön még most is azt hiszi, hogy csak szükséges kalandja voltam fiatalember korában és fölösleges mulatsága azután. Az önök multságait a szegények az életükkel fizetik meg. Gazdagok, előkelők, s hogy a gazdag meg az előkelő leányok tisztességesek maradhassanak, rávetik magukat a szegényekre, akiket nem kell elvenni. És még merik fönnhordani a fejüket, és ön, méltóságos asszonyom, még mer kérkedve lenézni rám? Gyilkosok maguk, gyilkosok, gyilkosok mind. Ó, hogy megvetem magukat! [...] Menjen az utcára, méltóságos asszonyom, ezrivel látja ott a leányokat, romlottak, romlottobbak, mint én. Azért, hogy maguk, gazdagok, tisztességesek lehessenek. [...] Nagyra tartják a becsületet, és jobban örülnek egy gyöngye szegény leánynak, mint tíz becsületesnek. A férfiaknak szüksége van ránk, azért kell pusztulnunk. És pusztulunk is, maholnap nem is lesz már szegény asszony, aki szegény gyermeket szülne’. Ibid., pp. 362-3.

thinks to herself that life must continue, for herself as well as for Demédy, who has put his wife in her grave.

In the postscript to the 1993 edition, György Bodnár writes that Kóbor's novel is a picture of the transformation of Budapest from being a stripling (*siheder*) into a metropolis, in which the old gods were replaced by the gods of lies. He also claims that Kóbor refused to take a position on what he saw, but just recorded everything.³⁵ It is difficult to conclude that *Budapest* is little more than a detached collection of notes and observations. On the contrary, it can easily be read as an explicit condemnation of the relations between the sexes governed by prostitution and exploitation. Éva and Olga, despite their different class and family backgrounds, both sell their love to win material security from a man, who happens to be the same man. The rich have the luxury of happiness, while the poor are constricted by harsh moral codes that condemn them as sinners as soon as they feel they might be entitled to anything more.

Kóbor's Budapest is certainly a city divided, not only along class and gender lines, but also between private and public. His interest is not so much in the impact of the money economy on morality, but on the need to keep up appearances and project a public persona of inner contentment. In one of the earliest scenes, Éva enters a coffee shop on Koronaherceg Street for lunch, and makes a show of leaving one cake on her plate, to indicate to the girl at the next table that she can afford not to eat it even though, of course, she is starving. On the streets, shop windows exist not to display the wares inside, but for the women to check their reflections and compare themselves to each other. Employment opportunities for women without academic qualifications were few and far between at the turn of the century, and most outside the factories worked in trade of one kind or another. For Éva, becoming an actress was the most natural progression from her former role as a politician's mistress, but this is not a mere echo of his idol Zola's portrayal of the 'golden fly' rising from the underworld to feed on high society and destroy the men

³⁵ 'Ma már nem lehet mennydörögni, nem is igen érdemes, egyszerűen le kell jegyezni, tudomásul venni mindent. Csak ítélni nem szabad, és állást foglalni'. Bodnár, 'Utószó' in *Ibid.*, p. 380.

in her wake,³⁶ for in *Budapest*, women are the victims, or more precisely, poor women are the victims of rich men and their obsession with maintaining an aura of respectability.

Kóbor intervenes as narrator twice in the novel, in the opening and closing chapters. At the end, he informs the kind reader that he had not run out of things to say, but paper.

This is just one picture of this city, not the whole picture. Whether I shall continue I do not know, although I should like to. I have illuminated the darkness upon which Budapest is built. Can I also write a second, third, fourth book about Budapest? I am full of dark views, and cowardice rules my soul. About that sad, bleak Budapest, of which I have spoken, I have no further inclination to say any more.³⁷

In stark contrast to Gárdonyi, for instance, Kóbor leaves it to the readers to draw their own conclusions, having provided them with an equally colourful and critical portrait of the 'social deficits' in Hungarian society.³⁸ It was almost twenty years after its publication that a critic noted that the uniqueness of *Budapest* lay in the fact that Kóbor had written a novel in which every character was Christian, but lived without a Christian disposition,³⁹ something which had not previously occurred to the novel's enthusiastic critics. This remark not only says something about the rise of antisemitism after the Great War and its influence on how literary works were judged, but also illuminates Kóbor's quiet achievement in *Budapest*. He excited his peers and the reading public with an urban narrative almost entirely free from the 'Jewish Question'. The only Jewish figures in the novel are the

³⁶ In his notes to *Nana*, Zola outlined his intention to portray Nana's role in Parisian society which regarded 'man as a material to exploit, becoming a force of Nature, a ferment of destruction, but without meaning to, simply by means of her sex and her strong female odour, destroying everything she approaches, and turning society sour just as women having a period turn milk sour. The cunt in all its power; the cunt as an altar, with all the men offering up sacrifices to it'. Cited in George Holden, 'Introduction' in Émile Zola, *Nana*, trans. and with an introduction by George Holden, London, Penguin, 1972, pp. 5-17 (pp. 12-13).

³⁷ 'Ez csak egyik képe ennek a városnak, nem az egész képe. Folytatom-e majd, nem tudom, noha akarom. A mélységbe világítottam be, amelyen Budapest épül. Megírhatom-e a második, a harmadik, a negyedik regényt is Budapestről? Tele vagyok sötétlátással, és a bátortalanság uralkodik lelkelmen. Arról a szomorú, sivár Budapestről, melyről most szoltam, nincs kedvem többet is mesélni'. Kóbor, *Budapest*, pp. 371-72.

³⁸ This term was coined by Péter Hanák in 'Vázlatok a századelő magyar társadalomról' in Pál Léderer (ed.), *Az úri Magyarországi. Társadalomszerkezet és rétegrajzok a kiegyezéstől a II. világháborúig*, Budapest, T-Twins, 1993, pp. 157-65.

³⁹ József Andor, 'Kóbor Tamás: Budapest' in *Élet*, 20, 1918, pp. 475-76.

aristocracy's pet Jews, admired for their patriarchal family relations, and a school-friend of Jani's, Toni Weisz, whom Jani envies for his money but pities for his stupidity. Non-Jewish writers felt compelled to write about Jews, and until the end of the Great War, many Jewish writers ignored themes of Jewishness. Kóbor was one of the very few who did not feel compelled to write about Jews at all, and although he was not a radical writer, his silence may be interpreted as the strongest statement he could have made at the time. When the first anti-Jewish law was passed in 1938 restricting Jewish membership of the professions, Kóbor, then sixty-one years old, reportedly told the poet László Bóka that he had thought of himself as a Hungarian writer his whole life, and was too old to become the child of Bermann again.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ 'Én egy életen át azt hittem, hogy magyar író vagyok, én belenyugodtam, hogy egy divatja múlt író lettem, de ahhoz öreg vagyok, hogy megint én legyek a Bermann gyerek'. László Bóka, 'Kóbor Tamás' in Bóka, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, Budapest, Magvető, 1966, pp. 972-73.

Harsányi and Navel-Gazing for a New Hungarian Utopia

The second novel proposes a rejection of the city's physical reality in favour of an inner vision, and a retreat from the external city to inner civilisation. Kálmán Harsányi (né Hlavács) was born in Mezőkövesd in 1876, and died in Budapest in 1929. A poet, fiction-writer and theatre critic of conservative temperament, he began his university studies at the arts faculty of Budapest University in 1894 but left after two years to work as a financial adviser in the Central State Treasury. He became a member of the Petőfi Society in 1909. Harsányi was the theatre critic for *Magyarság* for most of his working life, and also translated Calderón, Balzac, Dickens and Maeterlinck. *A kristálynézők* (The Crystal Gazers, 1914), the novel discussed here, was linked by László Németh to Dezső Szabó's *Az elsodort falu* in 1941:

All the most practical problems of *Az elsodort falu* lurk within the pages of this book. One feels that one should have been only pure and cultured, and one could already then see, if one wanted, how the remnants of *magyarság* must think in this colonised city and colonised country sinking to become [nothing more than] an unloading area for cosmopolitan goods.⁴¹

Harsányi's novel is a manifesto for the Christian conquest and occupation of middle-class positions, and the Hungarian capital itself. But unlike *Az elsodort falu*, it explicitly reclaims cosmopolitanism from the rootless and nation-less Jews and transforms it into an honest and respectable *Lebensphilosophie* befitting cultured Christian Hungarians. There is no call to forge future generations in the village nor any embrace of eugenics, but instead a programme of introspection, reflection and extreme subjectivity, inspired by a recipe for an élite corps of national saviours. But Németh appropriated *A kristálynézők* for his own ends, to a certain extent. Although the novel does portray Budapest as a colonised city, the reader is introduced to an environment sealed off from class antagonism, money, and

⁴¹ 'Az *Elsodort falu* legéletrevalóbb problémái mind itt lappanganak ebben a könyvben. Az ember érzi, hogy csak tisztának és műveltnak kellett lenni, s már ekkor megláthatta, aki akarta, hogyan kell gondolkodnia a maradék magyarságnak ebben a kozmopolita áruk lerakódóhelyévé süllyedő gyarmatvárosban és gyarmatorszámban'. László Németh, *Harsányi Kálmán*, Budapest, Készülődés, 1941, cited in György Bodnár, 'Utószó' in Kálmán Harsányi, *A kristálynézők*, first published in 1914, Budapest, Pesti Szalon, 1993, pp. 448-54 (p. 448).

politics. The world depicted here is minute, necessarily so because only a select few are part of the creation of a new Hungarian utopia, but the mundane everyday world of paid employment, for instance, makes not one intrusion into the lives of the main characters. *A kristálynézők* is explicitly timeless, reminiscent of Tibor Déry's experimental Budapest novel *Pesti felhőjáték* (Clouds Over Pest, 1933).⁴² In both works the exploration of love affairs within a small, incestuous group provides the framework for a wider investigation into how men and women conduct their relationships in a man-made urban environment over which they have no control. But Harsányi's style veers more towards that of the long essay or polemic: his intention, unlike that of Déry, is to leave the reader convinced of Budapest's precarious existence (it is threatened with submersion by an alien middle class), and its destructive effect on the psyche.

The novel's struggle for the city is complemented by a bleak presentation of the war between the sexes. The novel also attempts to provide an insight into the female psyche which is, apparently by its very nature, fearsome in its destructive potential. Although much of the novel takes place in private space, with the exception of the opening passage, a recital at the music academy, one café scene and the seemingly compulsory set piece of agony on a bridge, the women in this Budapest have undoubtedly made their public persona debuts as artists and writers. It is this crowding of public space that troubled male authors from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards:

Woman's increasingly open display of her power seemed the more public counterpart of that private power that man evoked, more and more anxiously [...]: both furnished them with formidable arguments against woman's emancipation. For most males luxuriating in dominance, a woman deserting her assigned sphere not only became something of a freak, a man-

⁴² Déry Tibor, *Pesti felhőjáték. Szerelmi regény két villámcsapás között*, Budapest, publisher not given, n.d. [1933]. Déry, a Jew, never associated the city itself with Jews in any pejorative sense, and his small group of characters in *Pesti felhőjáték* are ultimately responsible for their own troubles. The narrator remains aloof throughout, and leaves Budapest in the final chapter, finding it stifling and small. I mention this novel in passing and do not include it for analysis because although it depicts the middle classes at play, there is no connection suggested between the city and the outside world, except for its itinerant narrator. In other words, it does not engage with the notion that Budapest is not Hungarian.

woman; she also raised uncomfortable questions about man's own role, a role defined not in isolation, but in an uneasy contest with the other sex.⁴³

In *A kristálynézők* the war between men and women is very real, complete with battle manoeuvres and fatalities. The novel moves this battle into the private domain of artists' studios and private flats, which is easily understood as a retreat into a very select environment free of loud-mouthed Jews who drown everyone else out in the café, according to the sole coffee-house scene.

The city is debated, scorned and finally deified (here, over the course of one man's gradual decline into mental illness) in the novel, but only exists in the background. The city is without doubt the heart of the country in this novel, and yet it is the hero's dream to transform it into a manifestation of the true soul of Hungary, a cultural shrine or monument of true European standing, befitting the great potential of Hungarian culture. The protagonist is one Fábrián Balogh, a divorced music critic who has returned to the city after seven years in an unspecified rural location spent recovering from his ex-wife Júlia's murder of their young son. During his absence the city has been somewhat sullied by the presence of a shady 'suicide denomination' (*öngyilkos-felekezet*),⁴⁴ a group that has wormed its way to the top of society and imposed a fake cosmopolitanism and cynicism upon city life and its institutions. Balogh's desire is to restore a genuine cosmopolitan culture, both Hungarian and European, and decidedly un-Jewish. His search for like-minded young optimists of an artistic bent leads him into the company of the playwright, Tamás Divéky, the painter, Fülöp Urvári-Unger, and a number of impressionable young women, among them Mónika, the actress, Lydia, the artist's model, and Laura Pataky, a sculptor. His acquaintances revere him instantly, soaking up his cynical but perceptive thoughts on life and art, but are most intrigued by his practice of crystal gazing. His role is to inspire his new friends to seek within themselves the solutions to their existential problems, and to turn inwards for artistic inspiration. The novel is set over eleven days, from

⁴³ Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Education of the Senses*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 169.

⁴⁴ The meaning of 'suicide denomination' is never made clear in Harsányi's novel. I understand it to mean a discrete group who oppose Balogh's vision. They might be Jews, or Jewish and Gentile cynics.

January 13 to 24, 1913, and for only one of these days, January 15, Balogh and friends constitute a new group of *Übermenschen*, dreamers and seers liberated from the tyranny of bogus art and mores, the dirt of Budapest, the false god of Paris, and the hypocritical compulsion to act. Shortly before finding an oasis of calm and sanity in the superficial city in the form of his new friends, he resolves not to be consumed by hate (presumably for the Jews in cafés he finds so offensive), but to find solace and strength through introspection.

Balogh claims to be able to travel through time and witness historical events through crystal-gazing, amongst them the construction of the Tower of Babel and the trial and sentencing of Socrates. Unlike the Indian practitioners of occultism who, he claims, find their dreams in crystals, he has turned the process on its head and can now not only see reality but also dictate his dreams. This is an exercise in regaining individual and collective faith through autohypnosis, preferably in front of an audience. Having rejected any intervention in public life, for literature and periodicals will not change anything, the group become intoxicated with his proposed cult of youth and the future. Here, there is one clear parallel with *Az elsodort falu*, in that the past is to be rejected as immaterial: what matters is the present and the immediate future. Although Balogh and friends occupy themselves with reading Kropotkin and Stirner, Diderot's [sic] *The Origin of Races*, Dante, Scandinavian mythology and the Vedanta, the past and its works are only consumed as forms of sustenance for the immediate present. Guided by the belief that there is nothing above nature in nature, Balogh momentarily convinces the young aesthetes of his programme of individual liberation through subjectivity.

His plan is scuppered by the machinations of women, or rather the vain women who succumb to the flattery of Júlia, his ex-wife. The first public crystal-gazing session is a farce, since Mónika fakes the entire performance in which she claims to 'see' Rome, St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican in extraordinarily rich detail. She asks to keep the crystal for herself, and it is only after Balogh has handed it over that he realises she is league with Júlia. The other female characters jump at the opportunity to participate in this charade, with the exception of Lydia, who idolises Balogh and is characterised in a similar way to Szabó's later creation

of Mária, peasant mother of János Bőjthe's children in *Az elsodort falu*.⁴⁵ Lydia is an entirely vacuous creature only mildly more articulate than Mária. She wants to be filled with Balogh's wisdom and made complete in his service, as she declares:

Yesterday I felt that my place was next to you. In whatever way, but next to you. Here I am! I see that I am not needed, but I shall still stay. [...] I will be your humble little servant. I have never been anyone else's anyway. But next to you I must be humble. It will not be difficult. You are like a king. Like a beautiful, sad king whose empire has been stolen from him. I shall be your people. Who fear and serve you. Who love you.⁴⁶

Although Balogh does not discourage Lydia's unswerving dedication, there remains an unbridgeable intellectual and spiritual chasm between men and women. In the opening chapter, while attending a Bach recital, it occurs to Balogh that Jesus was a man, and that His tragedy was the tragedy of a man. Women cannot have learned from Him; they are incapable of grasping logic; nor can they experience transcendence or selflessness. Lydia cannot and will never understand him; she only requires his life-confirming presence for herself. It remains unclear, however, what Balogh wants from Lydia, other than a loyal audience of one. Balogh's criminally insane ex-wife provides the evil witch stereotype in contrast to the naive Lydia, but none of the women are motivated by money, and there is no hint at prostitution under any name.

Budapest is attributed female characteristics and is thus an object of love and desire. Like a woman, she can induce or at least contribute to madness. Balogh loves the city, but bitterly and disappointedly. 'This town is anybody's girl; every drop of her blood is subversive poison, but her face is beautiful. This shimmering, angelic lake is the face of Budapest. And it attracts, like every beauty, regardless of

⁴⁵ It is unlikely that this particular parallel is what Németh had in mind when he claimed that *A kristálynézők* was a precursor to *Az elsodort falu*. Szabó had read and admired Harsányi, and his female characters are about as flimsy as those of Harsányi's. See Chapter 4.

⁴⁶ 'Tegnap úgy éreztem, hogy melletted van a helyem. Akárhogyan, de melletted. Itt vagyok! Látom, hogy nem kellek, mégis itt maradok. [...] Alázatos kis szolgáldó leszek. Ugysem voltam még soha senkié. De melletted alázatosnak kell lenni. Nem lesz nehéz. Olyan vagy, mint egy király. Mint egy szép, szomorú király, akinek elvették a birodalmát. Én leszek a néped. Aki fél és szolgál téged. Aki szeret téged'. Harsányi, *A kristálynézők*, pp. 196-97.

what lies behind it'.⁴⁷ Balogh ponders an article he wrote, 'The Soul of Budapest' (*Budapest lelke*) in which he put forward the entirely unoriginal notion that the city had not developed organically.

This city had not developed [during Balogh's seven-year absence], only grown. And it was not the trunk that grew, only its tendrils. The trunk withered; a parasitic mass of implanted foreign feelings and thoughts is killing the trunk. This city is heathen, cosmopolitan; this city does not love itself, does not love the land on which it stands [...] It is anxious to be out of this country because it is foreign, because every second soul extracts from it desire, instinct, affinity. Inward, [it is, or there is] nothing. This city always thinks it can hear the Word of God whenever there is some noise over the borders. And if it looks inwards, between the Tisza and the Danube, it can only laugh, mock and disparage. This city is estranged. The heart of this country is estranged! [...] But the veins run out in every direction, and in the veins is rotten blood, and in the rotten blood are evil thought bacteria!⁴⁸

The Magyar, according to Balogh, must resist the malign influence of those loud-mouthed types who changed their names to become full-blooded Budapesters (*vérbeli budapestiek*), and be like Atlas in opposition to fake money and holy business (*hamis pénz, szent üzlet*). He complains to his friend and budding protégé Divéky of the stratum that has swum to the top.⁴⁹ Cynicism, in all its guises, is the enemy. Balogh despairs at his friends' faith in the false god of Paris. Divéky declares: 'This is a storm in a teacup. It's nothing. Hungary is Balkan, Budapest a village, and its art connoisseurs are still stuck looking at wooden canteens covered

⁴⁷ 'Éz a város bárki lánya; minden csöpp vére bomlasztó méreg, hanem az arca gyöngyörű. Ez a csillogó, tündéri tó Budapest arca. És ez vonz, mint minden szépség, bármi legyen is mögötte'. Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁸ 'Ez a város nem fejlett azóta, csak nőtt. És nem a törzse nőtt, csak a vadhajításai. A törzse sorvad, a törzsét öli a beléplántált idegen érzések és gondolatok élősdie serege. Ez a város hitetlen, kozmopolita, ez a város nem szereti önmagát, nem szereti a földet, amelyen áll [...] kikívánczik ebből az országból, mert idegen, mert minden második lelket kifelé húz belőle a vágy, az ösztön, rokonérzés. Befelé: semmi. Ez a város mindig az Igét véli hallani, valahányszor valami zaj van a határokon túl. És ha befelé néz, a Tisza-Duna közé, akkor csak nevet, csúfolódik és becsmérel. Ez a város kiszakadóban van innen. Ennek az országnak kiszakadóban van a szíve! [...] De mikor szanaszét futnak belőle az erek, az ereken romlott vér, s a romlott vérben gonosz gondolatbaktériumok!' Ibid., pp. 97-8. In 1914, when *A kristálynézők* was published, Szabó was already promoting his notion of the 'organic placement' of the Magyar, which had been displaced by the Jews' parasitic relations to Hungary. Dezső Szabó, 'A magyar organikus elhelyezkedése', *Huszedik Század*, 1914, 1, pp. 340-47. For Németh's notion of the national spine, see my Introduction, footnote 77. The word *térfoglalás* (literally, occupation of space) was frequently used by antisemites to refer to the way in which the Jews 'took up too much room' in Budapest. One might contrast *térfoglalás*, then, with the grander, and undoubtedly Hungarian practices of *honfoglalás* and *meghódítás*.

⁴⁹ 'És ez a réteg úszik felül, ez a réteg!' Harsányi, *A kristálynézők*, p. 72.

with pony skin. Come to Paris!’⁵⁰ Balogh’s alternative is local, in the form of an élite corps of dreamers. There is, he says, a group of people numbering around ten thousand in whose hands the fate of Hungarian culture rests. This group consists of three smaller sub-groups: first are the loud-mouths (Jews), second the disillusioned, and third those restless souls, divided again into those already asleep and those who do not want to fall asleep. ‘If this nation can still be saved, only those who do not want to fall asleep can save it. We are the dreamers, those with their heads buried in the sand and the crystal gazers who no longer believe that true values could ever break through the stratum swimming at the top. My denomination is great, truly great!’⁵¹ His denomination is, of course, led by himself, the troops of which are male, the standard-bearers female.

The city will destroy all that is good, old, valuable and Magyar, and replace it with nothing, dressed up in fancy borrowed clothes.

The houses, rows of houses and the castle gates which he had seen in the Castle district and of which no trace remained came to his mind, and any other city would not have destroyed them for all the jewels in the world had there been even one truly modern soul among its leaders. Budapest destroyed it. [...] And in order to make the destruction complete, they did not leave the tidied remains empty, as Rome did, for example, with the deserted squares situated between the Lateria and the Santa Croce di Gerusalemme, but instead built in walls hidden in medieval costume from which the borrowed clothes slip off. [...] And exactly the same is happening over there too, on the Pest side. In its heart as well, the thousand-year-old heart, in the Belváros. Stone shall not remain laid on stone, everything must be destroyed which is memory, which is holy, which is pious. Everything which is historical, which is pure-blooded, which is Hungarian.⁵²

⁵⁰ ‘Ez forradalom egy pohár vízben. Ez semmi. Magyarország Balkán, Budapest falu, amelynek műértői még a csikóbőrös kulacsoknál tartanak. Gyere Párizsba!’ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁵¹ ‘Ha megmenthető még ez a nemzet, úgy csak ezek az elaludni nem akarók menthetik meg. Az alvók mi vagyunk, a homokba fúrt fejűek és kristálynézők, akik már nem hiszünk abban, hogy a felszínen úszó réteget valaha is áttörhessék még az igazi értékek. Az én felekezetem nagy, igen nagy! ...’ Ibid., pp. 154-55.

⁵² ‘Házak, házsorok és várkapuk jutottak eszébe, amelyeket még látott itt a Várban, amelyeknek nyoma sem volt már, s amelyeket a világ minden kincséért le nem rombolt volna egyetlen más város sem, ha csak egyetlenegy igazán modern lélek akad is vezetői közt. Budapest lerombolta. Hitt azoknak, akik a gyökereit, a múltját, a törzsökét igyekeznek meggyűlöltetni vele. És hogy teljes legyen a rombolás, nem hagyták üresen az eltakarított romok helyét, mint Róma tette például a Laterán és a Santa Croce di Gerusalemme között elterülő puszta térségeken, hanem beépítették középkori jelmezbe bújtatott falakkal, amelyekről lesír a kölcsönkért ruha. [...] S ugyanis folyik

Who are the architects of this boundless villainy? Certainly not the Hungarians themselves, but that fake cosmopolitan hybrid element (*álkozmopolita keverékelem*) who are bleeding the nation dry. This all leads to the question what Balogh would put in its place: to build without ostentation; to create 'original forms' from noble and radiant material. This architectural revolution is to be constructed from 'nothing but stone, nothing but marble, nothing but mosaics, nothing but eosin, nothing but pewter contoured colour glass work, nothing but fresco, nothing but beauty!'⁵³ The whole city must be colourful and smiling, the Danube banks being the most beautiful of all, where 'vast-proportioned or graceful little palaces may luxuriate, for centuries, in their reflections in the sparkling mirror at their feet. Everywhere will be balconies, terraces, columned porches, marbled loggie'.⁵⁴ Free of any trace of brick, ornamentation or banality, the style will be rich and varied, original and inexhaustible, born of a European spirit and Asian imagination, or the western practical common sense inspired by the eastern love of pomp. 'Whatever you want to call it: original, Hungarian and beautiful'.⁵⁵ Dreaming of what befits the heart of this country (beauty, truth, and deeply Hungarian and European culture), Balogh points out to his muse what lurks behind the dark silhouettes:

Look around you! If only you knew what is behind these dark silhouettes! Clarity, Lydia! Clarity, or, purity, work, faith, true knowledge, true art, true culture, the clarity of the world! Not by accident is this the heart of the country; it is from here that the light, the warmth, the strength emanate to the whole country, and it is to here that they return. This great heart pursues to the end the energies, the life-sustaining holy energies in the brain. How

odaát is, a pesti oldalon. Annak is a szívében, az ezeréves szívében, a Belvárosban. Kő kövön nem marad, mindennek pusztulnia kell, ami emlék, ami szent, ami kegyletes. Mindennek, ami történelmi, ami törzsköcs, ami magyar'. Ibid., p. 259-60.

⁵³ 'Csupa kő, csupa márvány, csupa mozaik, csupa eozin, csupa önkontúros üvegszínjáték, csupa freskó, csupa szépség!' Ibid., p. 408-09.

⁵⁴ 'Ahol a roppant arányú vagy kecses kis paloták századokon át gyönyörködhetnek a lábuk előtt csillogó tükörből önmagukban. Erkélyek, teraszok, oszlopos tornácok, márványcsipkés loggiák mindenütt'. Ibid.

⁵⁵ 'És a stílus? Gazdag és változatos, eredeti és kimeríthetetlen. Európa szellemével megfékezett ázsiai fantázia szülötte, vagy a Kelet pompaszeretétől megihletett nyugati gyarkorlatiságé, ha úgy esik neked jobban. Bárminek nevezzük is, eredeti, magyar és gyönyörű.' Ibid.

glad I am for this, but how natural it is, this is how it must be! How could it be any different?⁵⁶

By the time Balogh expresses his utopian plans to Lydia he is already hearing voices and Handel's Messiah at top volume in his head. Quite mad, the novel closes with him writing furiously and listening to no one, his religious ecstasy having cut him off from the outside world. Júlia ends up in an asylum, removed from society so that she can do no further harm, and although Balogh remains outside the walls of an institution, he has imprisoned himself in his dream of constructing the new Hungary.

Despite the novel's covertly antisemitic critique of the Hungarian capital, and its portrayal of a vicious battle between the sexes, its concentrated focus on a miniature world within the city leaves no room for diatribes on the corrupting influence of money and the concomitant degeneration of morality, which the reader might reasonably expect from a conservative-minded writer of the 1910s. This is not a struggle for material resources, but for the spiritual ascendancy of Magyar Christendom, and a warning that he who fancies himself as a prophet will encounter many obstacles, none of which he will be able to control. Harsányi takes little trouble developing his female characters, *femmes fatales* or *femmes fragiles*, and does not overwork gendered depictions of the city. Nevertheless, this novel interweaves one man's utopian dreams for the anti-materialist conquest of Budapest into his struggles against the participation of women in public life. Conquest of the sacred Hungarian capital will destroy fake culture, cynicism and the power of women.

I now turn to a novel by a conservative female fiction-writer which addresses the same themes, although from the point of view of a woman active in public life in the 1910s.

⁵⁶ 'Nézz körül! Ha tudnád, mi van e sötét sziluettek mögött! Világosság, Lydia! Világosság: vagyis tisztesség, munka, hit, igaz tudás, igaz művészet, igaz kultúra, a világ világossága! Nemhiába ez az ország szíve, innen árad szét az egész országba a fény, a melegség, az erő, és ide is tér vissza onnan. Az energiákat, a létfenntartó szent energiákat ez a nagyszerű szív hajszoja végig az agyvelőkön. Hogy örülök én ennek, pedig így természetes, így kell lennie! Hogyan is lehetne másként!...' Ibid., p. 399.

Ritoók versus The Adventurers of the Spirit

Emma Ritoók (1868-1945) was a writer, essayist and translator, and one of the founding members of the Sunday Circle (*Vasárnapi kör*, also known as the Lukács Circle), a group of young philosophers, musicians and artists whose weekly meetings provided a forum to discuss questions of ethics and aesthetics from 1915 to 1919. The group centred on Georg Lukács, and also included Károly (Karl) Mannheim, Béla Balázs, Leo Popper and Anna Lesznai. Ritoók graduated in 1906, and worked as a librarian at the Metropolitan Library from 1920 to 1932. She first made her name when her novel *Egyenes úton, egyedül* (On a Straight Path, Alone) was published in *Új idők* in 1905. She participated in the movement for women's suffrage during the Great War but, unlike Lukács and Balázs, who held ministerial positions in 1919, she opposed the Commune and *A szellem kalandorai* (1921)⁵⁷ is her semi-autobiographical portrayal of the early years of youthful optimism, turning to disillusion and then into a personal vendetta against her former comrades. Always more conservative than her contemporaries, Ritoók finally embraced the counter-revolution and even puts in an appearance in *An Outlaw's Diary* as a friend and confidante of Cécile Tormay.⁵⁸

The novel was probably begun in 1915-16, and completed in 1919-20. The second part, which opens with scenes from the Great War, is quite clearly different in style, tone and message from the first. The narrative is no longer an ambling dissection of the growing pains of a small, incestuous circle of friends; it ends up a blunt, rushed, and unreflective work. Moving swiftly and disjointedly from the minutiae of emotional wrangles and a cult of subjectivity, the emphasis turns to the racial qualities of the characters, and features some highly unlikely speeches made by Communist luminaries about the marriage of Slav mysticism with Jewish genius: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the concomitant world domination of Judaeo-Bolshevism, a notion Ritoók alleged was embraced, albeit in private, by Kun and his comrades. The reader is ever more frequently bludgeoned with stilted

⁵⁷ Emma Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai* [1921], Budapest, Pesti Szalon, 1993.

⁵⁸ See chapter 4.

passages on Jewish ‘imperialism’ and ‘internationalism’. In *A szellem kalandorai*, the establishment of the Commune signals the end of order. Budapest has been turned upside down and inside out; the ghetto has been imposed on the Hungarians as the Jews now dictate the boundaries of time and space. This was an entirely unnatural state of affairs for Ritoók, whose husband Zsigmond, professor of medicine at the University of Budapest, was one of the founding members of the *Magyar Orvosok Nemzeti Egyesülete* (MONE, National Association of Hungarian Doctors, established in April 1919). A clandestine antisemitic group inspired by Bishop Ottokár Prohászka’s Christian Socialists, MONE stood for a ‘Christian concentration’ in the medical profession and the ethnic cleansing of its ranks.⁵⁹

The first part of the novel traces the childhood, adolescence and young adulthood of a small group of people, the central figure of which is Ervin Donáth (Lukács). Born into a middle-class family who largely ignore him, he is a precocious fantasist, terrified and repulsed by the poverty of childhood friends, and his fascination with the mystery of woman pursues and guides him throughout his life. As a young boy, he is interested in metaphysics and girls, in that order. He lectures his friends, among them Gyula Wéber, whose life will run parallel to his own, on the subject of women: ‘The great “X” in the mathematics of life, the unknowable at the centre of scientific certainty ... the partner and the enemy ... the temptress and the saviour ... the unreachable and the eternal desire ...’⁶⁰ Although he comes from a relatively well-to-do family, he is still driven by a desire for money, privilege and authority. Convinced of his intellectual calling from an early age, he combines his love of and need for women and money in his life-long search for rich sponsors of the female variety. His genius, he believes, precludes the need to pursue paid employment or even publish his thoughts. In one scene, he is graciously turned down for a lecturing post by Professor Marcus (probably Simmel, under whom both Ritoók and Lukács studied in Berlin) on the grounds that his obvious intelligence has not yet found printed form. Donáth is unperturbed

⁵⁹ MONE’s influence in the highly-politicised medical profession meant that the medical faculty of Budapest University applied the 1920 *numerus clausus* to maximum effect, well beyond the letter of the law, and refused entry to all Jewish students. MONE was not active outside the capital.

⁶⁰ ‘- A nagy X az élet matematikájában, a megismerhetetlen a tudományos biztonság közepette ... a társ és az ellenség – a kísértő és a megmentő ... az elérhetetlen és az örök vágy ...’ Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai*, p. 37.

by such trifling worldly concerns. His love affairs also feed his belief that his philosophy is transcendental and will reveal God. Having lost his virginity to minor royalty, he proceeds to steal Wéber's girlfriends, and throughout the novel conducts an intimate friendship with one Héva Bartoldy, Ritoók's alter-ego in the work and the antithesis to Donáth: Christian, from a conservative minor gentry background, and plagued by a conscience. Two events in particular convince Donáth further of his prophetic potential. Following the death of his mother, he discovers that not only is he Jewish, but also descended from the famous rabbi Eli-Ben-Aron. The narrator imagines how his physical and spiritual heritage become clear to him:

And if for one moment the fear of racism stunned him, he now sought with conscious pride his connections with the people of the Prophets [...] It was not Plato who was his ancestor, but Philon, Jesus, Spinoza and together with them he was a son of God's chosen people from the faith-founding tribes of humanity. His imagination, his belief, his certainty gained new ground [...]. Everything received a new colour, a secret meaning of which he was compelled to speak, to pour into someone's soul; and among the scattered letters he began to write to Héva who was now decorating a Christmas tree in memory of the Palestinian Jewish Messiah in a quiet village for heathen children while a new Messiah awaited her here. His jubilant self-confidence turned into giddiness, and his letter spoke of the boundary between madness and belief.⁶¹

His second conversion comes with the advent of the October Revolution in Russia. Inspired by his experiences at the front in the Great War and somewhat enamoured of the annihilation of the individual by military discipline, Donáth's desire to be at the centre of a world-historical turn (*világtörténelmi fordulat*) leads him to seek sponsorship from the Roman Catholic Church. His fantasies about one more rich girl, whom he describes as the queen of beauty and property, are shattered by the priest's firm but friendly rejection of his manuscript. A few days later, news comes of the Soviet victory. Donáth's natural enthusiasm gets the better of him, and

⁶¹ 'S ha egy pillanatra a fajgyűlölet ijedelme megszedítette, most tudatos büszkeséggel kereste az összefüggéseket a próféták népével [...] Nem Platón volt az őse – Philon, Jézus, Spinoza és velük együtt ő is Isten választott népének fia az emberiség vallásadóinak törzséből. Képzelete, hite, biztonsága új teret kapott [...] Minden új szint, új, titokzatos jelentést kapott, melyet el kellett mondani, átöntenivalakinek a lelkébe; s a még szétszórt levelek között Hévának kezdett írni, aki most egy csendes faluban a palesztinai zsidó Messiás emlékére karácsonyfát díszít hitetlen gyermekeknek, míg egy új Messiás vár itt reá. Ujjongó önbizalma szédületté vált, és a levél a hit és örültség határáról szólt'. Ibid., p. 198.

before long, he is making speeches to ardent young Communists gathered at a friend's flat alongside one Antal Korb (Béla Kun). This is the point at which the portrayal of Lukács embarks on a fantastic trajectory. Donáth's esoteric ideas are quite beyond the grasp of his comrades, later borne out by the 'Lukács Debate' of 1949-51 when Lukács was forced to engage in a bout of self-criticism to placate Party cadre.⁶² In the novel, suddenly and, quite out of character, Donáth uses the word 'Aryan':

They entered another café talking about war, religion and revolutions [...]. Donáth's fanaticism, as ever, settled into the new train of thought within a couple of hours, and as Korb began speaking of the Jews' calling, now being realised in Russia, the site of the most bitter oppression, like a sign of his eternal chosen-ness, Donáth also found the continuation of his own earlier thinking. And he began to speak of how he was driven down two paths by two different traditions – like the whole of world history – and how many times the older and stronger had protested within him against any Aryan origin.⁶³

Having laid the foundations for the distinction between Jewish and Christian morality earlier on, the novel now proceeds into the territory of diatribe by means of panic-stricken conversations between Héva and her rich friend Margit (whom Donáth had once wanted to marry before even meeting her). The Hungarians are blamed for having let the Jews get away with it for so long. Margit informs the distraught Héva that her old friends Donáth and Korb are behind the Commune, and continues: 'We deserve it, oh, how liberal we were, and how we looked down upon the antisemites, [...] when the whole world was already full of that Jewish internationalism, that Jewish freemasonry, that Jewish literature, that Jewish press, that Jewish capital, that Jewish science, that Jewish philosophy, and now there will

⁶² See János Ambrus, *A Lukács-vita (1949-1951)*, Budapest, Múzsák, 1985; and Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1974.

⁶³ 'Újra betértek egy kávéházba, háborúról, vallásról, forradalmakról beszélgetve [...]. A Donáth fanatizmusa, mint mindig, pár óra alatt belehelyezkedett az új gondolatmenetbe, és mikor most Korb a zsidóság hivatásáról kezdett beszélni, mely most Oroszországban, a legkeserűbb elnyomtatás helyén kezd érvényesülni, mintegy az örök kiválasztottság jeléül, Donáth is megtalálta egy régi gondolatának folytatását. És arról kezdett beszélni, hogyan vezette őt is két úton két különböző hagyomány – mint az egész világfejlődést -, s hogy a régibb és erősebb hányszor tiltakozott benne az árja eredet ellen'. Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai*, p. 474.

be that Jewish world domination'.⁶⁴ The Jews are everywhere, 'it is as if they wanted to avenge the medieval ghetto upon us ... and there are those from our race who have lost themselves in [the Jews'] words and do not wish to open their eyes to [the Jews'] deeds'.⁶⁵ The Jews' success lay in their occupation of the territory of the middle class. Margit continues:

Oh, the great players of theories, the gamblers of words, the adventurers of ideas ... but the others, too! For they have already been everywhere for a long time now – from the wine cellars to the stock exchange they interwove into the middle class, they were the gentry and the magnates, the freemasons and the ultramontanes – socialist leaders, teachers, artists ... they wrote the plays, and they performed them, and we applauded, applauded ... our own degradation [...] we saw nothing while they prepared Jewish world domination.⁶⁶

Margit and Héva both flee the city, and Héva leaves Hungary, ending up in hiding in Switzerland with her family, after her younger brother had shot a Red soldier who had demanded that their mother remove the red, white and green flowers from her hat. The fate of Donáth is realised in the final chapter, in which he also flees. He is escaping the counter-revolution, and being driven by a chauffeur. On a railway platform he meets the disgruntled Wéber who has crossed over to the other side, and who empties his revolver into the fallen Commissar.⁶⁷ This is the sole instance in the entire novel when a male character acts to defend the honour of Christian Hungary, and is also the only instance of class revenge. Wéber's poverty had scared Donáth as a child, and Donáth continually belittled him throughout their adult lives. Otherwise, it is women who internalise the homeland and carry the patriotic burden which, the novel suggests, is something intangible and perhaps

⁶⁴ 'Megérdemeljük – ó, milyen liberálisuk voltunk, és hogy lenéztük az antiszemitékat, hogy nevezhettek már akkor magukban, már akkor megvolt az egész világon a zsidó internacionalizmusuk, a zsidó szabadkőművességük, a zsidó irodalmuk, a zsidó sajtójuk, a zsidó tőkéjük, a zsidó tudományuk, a zsidó filozófiájuk, és most meglesz a zsidó világbirodalmuk'. Ibid., p. 493.

⁶⁵ '... mintha rajtunk akarnák megbosszulni a középkori gettót ... és vannak a mi fajunkból, aki beleörültek a szavaikba, és nem akarják látni a tetteiket ...' Ibid., pp. 490.

⁶⁶ 'Ó, a teóriák nagy játékosai, a szavak hazardőrjei, az eszmék kalandorai ... de a többiek is! hiszen régen ott voltak már mindenütt – a pincebolttól kezdve a börzéig átfonták a középosztályt, ők voltak a dzsentrik és a mágánások, a szabadkőművesek és az ultramontánok – szocialista vezérek, tanárok, művészek ... ők írták a drámákat, és ők játszották, és mi tapsoltunk, tapsoltunk ... a magunk romlásának [...] semmit sem láttunk, míg ők a zsidó világbirodalmat megcsinálták'. Ibid., p. 491.

⁶⁷ In real life Lukács remained very much alive and fled to Moscow following the collapse of the Commune.

even irrational. National feeling cannot be theorised, and this is why Jews, abstract thinkers, are condemned to be a people without a country for all eternity. While still attending grammar school, Donáth declares with some pride that if he does not succeed in Hungary, 'I will go abroad; I am not tied down by patriotic platitudes. I am thinking for humanity, and not for a narrow race. That my grandfather ended up by chance on one piece of land does not determine my future'.⁶⁸

The character of Héva raises the most intriguing questions of the novel. A sensitive and withdrawn woman, she seeks companionship and love in the company of men, besotted with, in turn, Donáth and László Szilveszter, an unremitting womaniser and father of her deceased best friend's daughter. On learning that Donáth had forced a woman to abort his child, Héva begins to realise that his arrogance knows no bounds, and that they will never be soul-mates. She is reminded by both men that she lacks femininity: they respect her intellect, and it is because of this that they cannot regard her as an object of desire. Eternally single, she gradually withdraws from the Circle and retreats into the bosom of her family on their country estate, where feelings are based on blood, love and warmth. The village, she feels, is peace, and life itself. She tires of men's need to compare all women to the Virgin Mary, for all will fall short. Héva eventually suffers a mental breakdown, having failed to be to Donáth what Sonya was to Raskolnikov, a role she was clearly not cut out for but which she pursued in the mistaken hope that it would gain her acceptance and love. Shortly before the 1919 revolution, she goes to hear Donáth give a public talk in Budapest.⁶⁹ Discussing God in abstract terms, she realises that all his talk of the divine has only ever referred to himself, and that he is not a true believer. She leaves the hall, never to contact him again. The Commune, like Donáth's discovery of his Jewish roots and the Russian Revolution,

⁶⁸ 'Ha itthon nem sikerül, külföldre megyek; engem nem kötnek le hazafias frázisok. Én az emberiségnek gondolkozom, nem pedig egy szűk emberfajnak. Hogy a nagyapám véletlenül milyen darabjára került a földnek, az nem határozhatja az én jövőmet meg'. Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ His talk is a presentation of what is meant to be Lukács's first work, *Die Seele und die Formen* (1910). Letters of glowing praise written by Ritoók to Lukács in 1917 are reprinted in Éva Karádi and Erzsébet Vezér, *A Vasárnapi kör. Dokumentumok*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1980, pp. 137, 139-40. Ritoók addresses him as 'maga', a polite form of address used to address people with whom one is not familiar, as well as strangers. It is reserved, and although not too formal, can be considered rude and condescending. See Carol Rounds, *Hungarian: An Essential Grammar*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 125.

provides a turning-point for Héva. She must choose sides, and her belief in her race dictates that she flee the ghetto of Budapest.

The options for women before the Great War were indeed limited. Women had only been admitted to the faculties of medicine and arts at the University of Budapest in 1895, and very few were able to attain financial independence. The novel concludes that women were faced with two alternatives, marriage or mental illness, and perhaps both: Vera, Héva's best friend, had taken her life after giving birth to Szilveszter's daughter, unable to cope with the pressure of motherhood combined with the desire to be taken seriously as a sentient adult being in a man's world. Born in a small town, Héva refuses to wear skirts as a child and only plays with boys, and, determined not to become a martyr to woman's unhappy existence, she yearns for peace of mind in the city. But Budapest is without a character or values of its own, and hastily adopts any fashion from the West in a wholly uncritical fashion. 'The capital's new, barely hundred-year-old culture put up no barriers against [Western trends]. Its development was a breathless rush without original spirit, hunger for culture without the calm that is necessary for creation. Every trend that came from the West clung onto [city] thinking without roots, and became a source of superficial conflict'.⁷⁰ The paradox is that the woman desiring liberation, or even anonymity, is denied her wishes by the liberal, self-congratulatory elite of the city.

The pace of social change disturbed Ritoók. Her novel exudes disgust at the pollution and usurpation of the genteel Christian middle class by 'alien' elements, against whom her main charge seems to be that they have no taste. Small towns that grew too rapidly under the auspices of trade and progress became crowded with foreign names, new businesses and money. Until then, money had been silent and invisible, stored in the correct manner in private boxes and drawers, but was now used to build ugly, ostentatious houses by those who had no racial or family ties to rural traditions. Older families, their style and tastes, were gradually pushed

⁷⁰ 'A főváros új, alig százéves kultúrája semmi gátat nem vetett elébük. Új fejlődése lélegzetvesztett rohanás volt eredeti szellem nélkül, kultúréhség nyugalom nélkül, mely a teremtéshez szükséges. Minden áramlat, ami nyugatról jött, gyökértelenül tapadt meg a gondolkozásban, és felületes összeütközés forrásává lett'. Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai*, pp. 95-96.

out by the likes of lawyers, journalists and elegant bank employees whose exterior, language and cadences suited the town's ugly new face.⁷¹ Modernity is apparently noisy and ugly, but the smarter young people who exploited their knowledge of capital to marry the daughters of parvenu Jewish families, gave their children noble names. Within a couple of generations, by the 1890s, the whole town was assimilated and a new bourgeoisie had taken shape.⁷² In other words, miscegenation contributed to the decline of the pure Hungarian middle class.

Mary Gluck provides an illuminating interpretation of the Sunday Circle,⁷³ and notes that early twentieth-century artists' hopefulness verged on messianic expectation. Modernism, which encompassed different, apparently contradictory elements, was held together by a passionate, almost 'eschatological mood of hope, despair, and elation'.⁷⁴ Lukács and his fellow aesthetes were indifferent, if not hostile, towards established religions, and yet sought to integrate the physical and spiritual in a life-affirming totality, 'ways to express their conviction that we can be religious about life itself'.⁷⁵ Anna Lesznai confirmed this view, writing that 'the political attitude of the group could be described as one of "left-leaning", but it would be more accurate to emphasise how apolitical most of us were [...] In fact, the group resembled more a religious gathering than a political club: the get-togethers had a ceremonial, quasireligious air, and the participants were obliged to tell the truth about everything'.⁷⁶ Blind faith certainly attracted where organised

⁷¹ 'Ezek építették a legcifrább házakat, legkönnyebben fogadták el az új stílust, mert faji vagy családi hagyomány nem kötötte őket szeretettel a vidéki építkezések kedves, elmaradt, térpazarló szokásához. Az egyszerű, művészietlen, de a maga nyugodt életének megfelelően kisvárosból zajos, csúnya, modern város lett. Még voltak ugyan öreg urak, akik pipával szájukban sétáltak hivatalba, de a főutcán fiatal ügyvédek siettek az új törvényszéki épületbe, újságírók fontoskodtak és kiabáltak sebtében az ismerősöknek, elegáns bankhivatalnokok sétáltak a déli korzón. Más típusú külsejük, nyelvük, hanglejtésük illett a város új arculatához'. Ibid., p. 29.

⁷² 'De akadtak az új nemzedékben ügyesebb, eszesebb fiúk is, akik hirtelen alkalmazkodni tudtak, vagy már beleszülettek a változásba, felvették a versenyt a beköltözőkkel, s gyakran vetélkedtek velük a pénzhétségben is. Jó nevük tőke volt, melyet a házasságban kamatoztattak, és zsidó vagy parvenü családok leányai nemsokára ősnemesi nevű gyermekeket szültek. A kilencvenes évek elejére, néhány évtized alatt, az egész város összeolvadt, új polgársága kialakult'. Ibid.

⁷³ Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation 1900-1918*, Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1985.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁵ Richard Ellmann, 'Two Faces of Edward' in *Edwardians and Late Victorians*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1960, p. 196.

⁷⁶ 'A csoport politikai attitűdjét durván "baloldali beállítottságúként" lehetne jellemezni; helyesebb azonban, ha azt hangsúlyozzuk, mennyire apolitikusak voltak valamennyien [...] A csoport

religion repelled many of the Sunday Circle, which was symptomatic of their desire to counteract some of the spiritual loss experienced as a by-product of modernisation. Feelings of enforced homelessness were transformed into a need for inner exile. Béla Balázs wrote to Lukács in January, 1911: 'It is only now that I have fully awakened to the bitter realisation of how aggressively, unmistakably, continuously alone and alien I feel in my milieu ... But this can and does have advantages. A reversed tragedy: everything on the outside collapses, and therefore I am forced to return home into myself'.⁷⁷

In *A szellem kalandorai*, the search for community initially goes hand in hand with rejoicing in the liberty of outsider status. The young dreamers create for themselves a new form of community, and place their fervent belief in themselves at the centre of their worldview, much like Balogh's utopian fantasists in *A kristálynézők*. But here, there is a double standard that punishes women. The desire to escape one's origin is once again denied. Members of the Sunday Circle had all come to the capital from small towns, and the novel presents an original thesis of energies transplanted to the city: young people from the countryside had arrived in Budapest at a time when villages remained villages; their desire to seek new opportunities is formed by their understanding and simultaneous resentment of tradition. The small town is presented as the kernel of urban civilisation: it is democratic, it respects tradition, and its culture is not motivated by money. However, it was only in the city that women were able to participate in public life as the equals of men, or so they thought. But both women and the city are revealed to be the territory of men. The males conquer and discard women at will, and it is only the male who can dream of occupying the city. The city is too young and immature, and was unable to erect any barriers against the intellectual invasion of alien, Western ideas. The heroine of the novel returns to her place of birth, before fleeing Hungary completely, leaving the question of Budapest's occupation unresolved. Her retreat relocates the woman's sense of place to a place where

valójában inkább hasonlított vallási gyülekezetre, mint politikai klubra: az összejöveteleknek szertartásos, kvázi vallások hangvételük volt, a résztvevők kötelesek voltak mindenről a teljes igazságot mondani'. Anna Lesznai cited in Karádi and Vezér, *A Vasárnapi kör*, p. 55.

⁷⁷ Cited in Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation*, p. 23.

social life exists, where ‘behind the liberal slogans there still remained, particularly in the women, the pure, noble pride of the elders [...]. In these old towns, the old churches were still there behind the town walls, the single-storey palaces remained with their columned gates on the spacious streets, their windows protected with lavish iron grids. The diverse beauty of German towns did not yet exist there, but a hard, clean, simple style of building’.⁷⁸ Exile to one’s point of origin, the small town, means retirement from the public arena, but this is embraced in *A szellem kalandorai* as liberation from the false promises of the city.

Móricz and the Caged Lion

The fourth novel pillories the sexual mores of a much less radical stratum of society. Zsigmond Móricz was born in Tiszacsécse in 1879 and died in Budapest in 1942. A fiction-writer, journalist and essayist, he is considered one of the greatest figures of twentieth-century Hungarian realist literature. Móricz’s peasant father, and his mother, the daughter of a Calvinist priest, did everything to ensure that their son would escape the peasant fate. As well as addressing the pressing social questions of his day, Móricz used his own life as raw material for his works, in particular his early years at Calvinist schools. He enrolled in the theology faculty at Debrecen, quickly transferred to the faculty of law, and finally ended up in the arts faculty. He moved to Budapest in 1900, having published his first journalistic works in Debrecen papers, but did not complete his studies, instead writing for the liberal *Az Újság* from 1903 to 1909. He made his name overnight with the publication of *Hét krajcár* (Seven kreutzers) in *Nyugat* (1908), in whose editorial offices he became friends with Ady. Móricz later edited *Nyugat* together with Mihály Babits, in the early 1930s. An enthusiastic supporter of the October 1918 revolution, he also welcomed the land reform measures and the formation of

⁷⁸ ‘Voltak régi városok [...] ahol a liberális jelszavak mögött megvolt még, különösen az asszonyokban, az öregek tiszta, nemesi büszkesége [...]. Ilyen városokban maradtak meg a várfalak mögött a régi templomok, téres utcákon a földszintes paloták oszlopos kapukkal, ablakaikon pompás veretű vasráccsal; nem volt meg bennük a német városok változatos szépsége, de kemény, tiszta, egyszerű építkezés volt’. Ritoók, *A szellem kalandorai*, pp. 93-94.

peasant associations during the Commune, under which he served on the writers' directorate. For this he was excluded from writers' societies under Horthy and could only publish in *Nyugat* and later *Estlapok*. He turned to writing historical novels in the 1920s and 1930s, and he bought the journal *Kelet Népe* (People of the East) in 1939, which he edited for three years until his death.

A conservative writer in temperament, style and subject matter, he was championed, and to some extent appropriated, by the Populists in the 1930s for his nineteenth-century realism, sober ethics and the centrality of 'the peasant' to many of his works. He could also count among his admirers Lukács, who rated his historical novels higher than more mercurial, modernist works such as those by Déry or Kosztolányi. Alongside *Jobb, mint otthon* (Better Than at Home, published posthumously in 1956) and *Az asszony beleszól* (The Lady Interrupts, 1934), *Rab oroszlán* (Caged Lion)⁷⁹ is one of Móricz's novels set in Budapest, written in 1936 when his reputation as a prominent Hungarian writer had been established for almost two decades. It is, however, a rather ambivalent text which poses more questions than it answers. Outwardly, at least, his portrayal of an unhappy middle-class marriage is yet another morality tale in which the characters learn their lessons, come to see the error of their ways, and realise that one has a station in life for very good reasons. But the temptations of the sinful parvenu city turn out to be too much for the self-congratulatory male to handle. He portrays bourgeois mores and introspection without an ounce of warmth, humour or empathy for the

⁷⁹ Móricz Zsigmond (1879-1942), *Rab oroszlán* in Móricz, *Regények IV. Móricz Zsigmond összegyűjtött művei*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1978, pp. 7-269. Móricz's earlier Budapest novel, *Az asszony beleszól*, concerns the lives of wives who are, in the words of Aladár Schöptlin, 'petty, argumentative, myopic, amorous and materialistic, good and gossipy, sociable and jealous, charming and entertaining; they are the maids, lovers and mothers of men, but real life belongs to the man, who do not live in a narrow little flat but in the big wide world, who does not rack his brains over today's lunch or the procurement of a new pair of shoes, but over national matters, media sensations or elegant affairs'. Schöptlin, 'Móricz Zsigmond Budapesten', *Nyugat*, 1934, 5, found online on 10 January 2006 at <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00573/17896.htm>. ('Kedvesek ezek az asszonyok, kicsinyesek, okoskodók, rövidlátók, szerelmesek és anyagiasak, jók és pletykázók, barátkozók és irigykedők, bájosak és mulatságosak, szolgálói, szeretői és anyái a férfinak, de az igazi élet a férfié, aki nem egy szűk kis lakásban él, hanem a nagyvilágban, nem a mai ebéd vagy a pár cipő előteremtésén töri a fejét, hanem országos dolgokon, újság-szenzációkon vagy elegáns kalandokon'.) I do not discuss *Az asszony beleszól* because it seems to me that that the portrayal of public and private morality in *Rab oroszlán* is better suited for my purposes of examining the tensions created by and enacted within the middle classes. To cover more than one lacklustre Móricz novel dealing with the division of emotional labour would also be rather repetitive.

characters, and his account of the relations between the sexes is particularly bleak. Free from any reference to current affairs or the rise of Fascism, *Rab orozslán* instead pursues the vanity and double standards of the genteel Christian middle class, that stratum of society supposedly edged out by parvenu Jews and championed by Ritoók, Tormay, Harsányi and others.

Aladár Vágrándy, the protagonist, the caged lion of the title, is a stocky, balding and proud civil servant of Tatar appearance in his mid-forties, married to the neurotic and painfully shy Juluka. Vágrándy's daily routine at the Ministry is disrupted by the apparently sudden arrival of two figures: Félix Schneider, Vágrándy's ginger-haired colleague, an obnoxious *pesti* type and compulsive teller of tall tales; and Ella, the twenty-something temporary secretary at the Ministry and object of Vágrándy's desire. Vágrándy, intoxicated with Ella's youthful femininity, finds himself suddenly drawn to women he does not know and will never meet. The more unavailable they are, the more he wants them. This is the local variation on the *flâneur* topos: men rarely walk the streets just for the sake of it in Hungarian literature, but instead traverse the city chasing women or contemplating suicide. On his way from the Ministry he stops at Kálvin Square to marvel at the anonymous beauties going about their business, all blissfully unaware of his gaze:

He felt some glowing heat within him: he would like to get to know this woman. The thought struck him that she could be a clerk coming from the office and heading home. But where to in the Belváros? How sad it was. There was a silent and sorrowful stillness in this woman. She moved so pleasantly and with such dignity, but like one who carries within them a great and inconsolable pain ... What could be wrong with such a young and astoundingly beautiful woman? He had barely seen her, only for a few moments, and had so many memories of her [...]. She stopped at the corner of Baross Street and turned back. He gazed in the direction of her disappearance ... He would never see her again. It is a strange and uncomfortably large town, this Pest ... If the woman lived in a small town, then of course he would know her. Such a woman could not be kept secret, the whole town would know of her. The whole county ... But here? His heart began to feel constricted, and it pained him that he would never see her again in this life, this woman whose soul he had drunk until he was full

in one short moment ... What would have to happen for him to meet her just once?⁸⁰

Vágrándy's fantasies of women revolve around his belief that there is no place for a single woman on the streets of Budapest, and he becomes obsessed with the lives of beautiful female strangers, whom he wishes to save from themselves. His mid-life crisis sees him engulfed in vanity and self-deception, believing that he is a viable suitor for nubile maidens everywhere. His only ally is his brother-in-law, the incorrigible Jani whose roving eye regularly threatens the longevity of his marriage to Matyi, Juluka's sister. During the course of their conversations over beer they attempt to absolve themselves of all responsibility for chasing skirt: nature dictates that women tempt men, who must be imprisoned within marriage to prevent the total breakdown of moral order. Vágrándy finally accepts his 'fate', but not before embarking on a series of adventures with youth and beauty in which he humiliates only himself.

He takes Ella to the Gundel restaurant, a playground for the wealthy and/or adulterous, where they discuss questions of life and philosophy, a somewhat fruitless pursuit given his conviction that women are incapable of abstract thought and can only hold opinions. He patiently explains to his date, who is half his age, why women should stay in the kitchen. His feelings for her are a mixture of abject pity and paternal lust. She provides him with familiarity: she is elegant and refined but, born in the inner city, she is also the embodiment of fallen femininity and lumpen spiritual poverty. Ever more intrigued by her ignorance of true Hungarian (*színmagyar*) life – she believes that Margit Island is the pinnacle of natural beauty – he also wishes to save her from her pursuit of independence, realised in the form

⁸⁰ 'Valami izzást és forrást érzett magában: szeretne megismerkedni evvel a nővel. Úgy maradt meg benne, hogy valami hivatalnoknő lehet, az is most jön az irodából, s megy hazafelé. De hova megy a Belvárosban? Milyen szomorú volt. Az egész nőben valami halk és bánatos nyugalom volt. Oly kedvesen méltóságosan s mégis egyszerűen ment, mint aki egy nagy, vigasztalhatatlan bánatot hord magával ... Mi baja lehet egy ilyen fiatal és csodálatosan szép nőnek? Alig látta, néhány pillanatig, s mennyi emléke van róla [...] Megállott a Baross utca sarkán, s visszafordult. Abba az irányba nézett, amerre a nő eltűnt ... Sohasem fogja többet látni. Furcsa és kellemetlenül nagy város ez a Pest ... Ha kisvárosban élne a nő, akkor persze ismerné. Egy ilyen nő nem maradhat titokban, arról az egész város tud. Az egész megye ... De itt? A szíve elkezdett szorulni, s fájt neki, hogy ezt a nőt, akit úgy meg tudott látni, hogy egy pillanat alatt az egész lelkét teleitta vele, soha többet ebben az életben nem láthatja. Minek kellene bekövetkezni, hogy még egyszer találkozzék vele?' Ibid., p. 45.

of dates with the objectionable and tempestuous Schneider who will challenge anyone to a duel over the most trifling matter.

Vágrándy is something of a caricature, the upstanding, proud Hungarian male who assumes superiority, but whose redemption ultimately comes in the form of humiliating forgiveness from his long-suffering wife. In conversation with a fellow employee at the Ministry, Vágrándy and colleague agree that the minute one arrives from the countryside and puts one's foot down in the city, one gives up the natural way of life and one's own kind. Women are so nervous and unhappy here, the men concur, because they spend all day alone at home: loneliness is the breeding-ground of sin. Living completely unnatural, childless lives, they wither away and conceal their physical decay with cosmetics, forced to spend family funds on their own beautification. The proliferation of chemist's shops only attests to this malaise, and husbands feel they cannot deny their wives the little pleasure of maintaining their girlhood beauty.⁸¹ But Vágrándy and his colleague are convinced that they will not succumb to the ills of the city: 'One must maintain old friendships ... Even if one ends up in Pest, one must not become *pesti* [*elpestiesedni*] ... The capital only destroys people ... makes us into cosmopolitans ... I shall never be *pesti*, come hell or high water ... What?'⁸² He insists on distinguishing himself from his irritating colleagues at the Ministry with robust masculine bouts of village swearing, which also serve to maintain his 'country health'.⁸³ Claiming that he is just a wild country animal, he is driven by natural

⁸¹ 'Az ember ide húzódik a vidékről s abban a pillanatban, mikor beteszi a lábát a fővárosba, lemond a természetes életről és a fajtájáról ... Ezért lesznek itt az asszonyok olyan idegesek és szerencsétlenek ... - Egész nap otthon vannak, egyedül. A magány a bűn fészke. Az asszonyok még ha nem vétkeznek is, nagyon egészségtelen életet kénytelenek élni. - És elhervadnak. - Ezen a kozmetika segít. A gyerektartás költségeit kénytelenek magukra költeni. Nem is képzelem, tanácsos úr, hogy az utóbbi húsz évben hogy felvirágzott a drogéria. Már minden utcában van nem is egy, hanem egész csomó. Csak itt is, ha az ember lemegy ez utcába, egyik a másikat éri. Ennek valami okának kell lenni. Nem a patika szaporodik, hanem a drogéria. Nemhiába költenek annyit a reklámokra. Belefektethetnek egy új púder reklámjába százötvenezer pengőt, behozza nekik, mert minden lakásban el lehet helyezni belőle hetenként egy-egy tubust legalább. Filléres árut pengőkért adnak, minden költségük bejön. Nem mondhatom a feleségemnek, hogy elég szép vagy te így a gyerekeidnek ... Ha nincs gyereke, nem vonhatom meg tőle azt a kis örömet, hogy mesterségesen tartsa fenn a lánykori szépségét ...' Ibid., p. 34.

⁸² 'Fenn kell tartani a régi barátságot ... Ha az ember Pestre kerül is, nem szabad elpestiesedni ... A főváros csak elrontja az embereket ... kozmopolitákat csinál belőlünk ... Én nem leszek pesti, ha a fene fenét eszik is ... Mi?' Ibid., pp. 43.

⁸³ 'Evvel a falusi káromkodással fentartotta magában a vidéki egészségét'. Ibid., p. 11.

passions and will never be *pesti* even though he has been a civil servant for over twenty years.

Vágrándy's questioning of private and public morality convinces him that he is salt of the earth dissipated by a world that is not his own, that of Budapest. Inspired by Móricz's first marriage to Janka Holics, who ended their twenty-year marriage by committing suicide in 1925, the novel is also an attempt to delve into the female psyche. Juluka is transformed from being a sickly, neurotic woman scared of her own shadow into a highly articulate fury when fighting with her husband, whom she suspects of having an affair with Ella. The explanation offered for Juluka's unhappiness comes on the first page. Vágrándy, pondering his immediate environment, decides that the preponderance of concrete is to blame for women's ills in the city.

He stopped and looked up at a tree: barren trees – and he just looked at it, and reflected on something [...] Here in Pest women are mostly barren. Was there some connection? Barren trees, barren flowers, barren women. [...] He slowly went on. This is a barren city. The deeper one goes into the city, the fewer children there are ... How is this so? On the peripheries there are many children: in the Belváros perhaps none. And if there are, they are hidden away. [...] This Pest is not good for a country girl. If we were to live somewhere back at home and there had been a little farmstead around them, his wife would also have flowered in a completely different way: she would have created. There would be a couple of healthy children, and her health would be different. Mostly her nervous health.⁸⁴

But Vágrándy, his brother-in-law and colleagues cannot keep themselves away from the sort of girl who can be invited to the cinema, and who thinks that country folk must be stupid to tolerate such terrible living conditions. The ageing men bask in an imagined reflected glory of their wisdom, despite their compulsion to seek girls further down the social ladder. It is this crisis of middle-class masculinity, tied to public respectability, that Móricz dissects. Again, the female characters are lack-

⁸⁴ 'Most megállott, s felnézett egy fára: Terméketlen fák – s csak nézte, és valamin tűnődött. [...] Itt Pesten általában terméketlen nők vannak. Van-e köztük összefüggés? Terméketlen fák, terméketlen virágok, terméketlen nők. [...] Lassan ment tovább. Ez egy terméketlen város. Minél beljebb halad befelé az ember a városba, annál kevesebb a gyermek ... Hogy is van ez? A perifériákon sok gyerek van: a belvárosban talán nincs is. Ha van is, eldugják. [...] Nem való egy vidéki lánynak ez a Pest. Ha valahol otthon élnének, s volna egy kis gazdaság körülöttük, egészen másképp virágzott volna a felesége is: termett volna is. Egy-két egészséges gyerek: az ő egészsége is más lenne. Főleg az idegállapota'. Ibid., pp. 7-9.

lustre. Ella's youth perhaps precludes the possibility of any thought-provoking conflict, and besides, her function is to reflect her ageing suitor's fantasies; Juluka is a rather flat character, even when she demands an account from her husband, believing that love means everything to a woman and nothing to a man. The twist in the tale is that she accuses him of infertility, denying him his barren tree analogy, but little does she know, Vágrándy had long ago impregnated their maid.

All attend a party in the closing chapter, where all the faces are the same, faces radiating warmth and contentment. Filled with food, drink, the finest tobaccos, this is their market where they cheerfully discuss business.

Every eye is seeking, looking into every face, adoring whatever stands on the next highest rank above himself [...] But in his heart [Vágrándy] looked around on this *tout Budapest* with mortal hatred, and thought that it would not last long: millions were waiting in the wings. Millions who bleed and fight for nothing, for four-hundred and six-hundred pengő pay-slips and the daily evening leftovers to eat [...] At last he met Jani. They were very pleased to see each other, and shook each other's hands as if they had bumped into each other at some foreign marketplace. At the vanity fair, together they were the only two honest people.⁸⁵

Vágrándy and Jani's self-congratulation is based on hypocrisy. Well-to-do and living in what they regard as islands of civilisation and rural values in the city, their rhetoric about the poor and needy is inspired by their own feelings of victimhood. At one point during an earlier argument with Schneider, Jani rails against the alien government and cites an axiom attributed to 'Bandi Zsilinszky', that there is only one minority in this country: Hungarians. Pondering the nature of love, Vágrándy despairs that the girls of today have liberated themselves and thus implemented a revolution against the laws of race. Well-versed in the self-aggrandising and pseudo-reformist mythology of the dislocated gentry, these two men repeat clichés of race and gender because it is what is expected of them, and because it puts them and their philandering in a more flattering light. They finally conclude that:

⁸⁵ 'Az arcokon teljesen egyforma megelegedés és vidámság. Ételek, italok, dohányok legfinomabbjai töltik el őket, és ez az ő vásáruk, ez az ő piacuk, ahol vígan beszélnek meg az üzletet. Minden szem keres, minden arc felfelé néz, a nálánál egy fokkal magasabb rangút imádja. [...] De az ő szívében halálos gyűlölettel néz körül ezen a "tout Budapesten", s arra gondol, hogy nem tart már soká: ömögötte milliók állanak. Milliók, akik vergődnek és harcolnak a semmiért, a négyszáz és hatszáz pengős fizetésekért és a mindenesti ételmaradékért. [...] Végre Janival találkozik. Nagyon megörülnek egymásnak, és úgy ragadják meg egymás kezét, mintha valami idegen vásárban kerülnének össze. A hiúság vásarán, ők ketten a két őszinte ember'. Ibid., pp. 247-78.

‘Marriage is just like the earth ... It becomes saline, but then life takes care of it, turning it over once again, and producing new soil’.⁸⁶

Rab oroslán is, like Kosztolányi’s *Édes Anna*,⁸⁷ an exploration of the precariousness of the ‘Christian’ middle-class psyche, the need for spiritual comfort and reassurance while harbouring an almost siege mentality in fairly privileged surroundings. The men believe themselves to be caged lions, wild and powerful beasts of the jungle trapped in a meaningless existence which they attempt to enliven by brief excursions into the arms of lower-class women. It is also an unflattering portrait of those civil servants born in rural areas who expected, and then filled, middle-ranking bureaucratic positions in Budapest, and spent the rest of their lives reassuring themselves that they were still good old country boys at heart. In this light, Móricz’s novel may be read as a critique of the power of those images of victimhood that sustained genteel rage at perceived injustices throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Conclusion

The four novels I have discussed in this chapter draw together a number of themes. They portray a city drunk on money and power, in which the appearance of respectability and success is more important than their attainment; the rapid pace of social change and the moral chaos it brought in its wake; the big-city inhabitant’s internalisation of the money economy; men’s need for women to flatter but never challenge their intellects; and the dearth of opportunities for women outside the family. Kóbor presents a city built on prostitution in various guises, and where an idealised image of woman saturates public life. In private, however, women are the losers. If there is a feminist novel among the four discussed here, it is *Budapest*. Harsányi’s 1914 polemic suggests a retreat from public life into the realms of the

⁸⁶ ‘– A házasság is olyan, mint a föld ... Elszikesezik, de akkor az élet gondoskodik róla, hogy újra forgassa jó mélyen, és új talajt terem’ . Ibid., p. 267.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 4.

subconscious, for it is here that the Hungarian utopia will be constructed. Relations between men and women in this limited sphere are bitter, with men suffering at the hands of *femmes fatales* and seeking solace from the proximity of *femmes fragiles*. Here, café society with its emancipated Jews and liberated women is the cynical face of Budapest, hence the need to escape the influence of the 'suicide denomination', to construct a cult of life, youth and subjectivity, and to transform Budapest into some ancient Greek temple in which men are presumably liberated from the tyranny of women. But this also has its pitfalls, namely disillusion and, ultimately, madness. Ritoók's novel, written before and after the Commune, is the most quixotic in its handling of the fate of women in a man's world. The desire for love and search for ways to be religious about life itself leads the actors towards either 'Judaéo-Bolshevism' and ministerial perks, or into exile in Switzerland. It is an insight into the gender politics of wartime left-leaning intellectual circles, as well as into the mindset of a woman whose former friends imposed their short-lived 'ghetto' from Budapest onto the entire country. The last work, Móricz's 1936 novel, is more challenging than the dissection of an unhappy middle-class marriage it first appears to be. He uncovers the hypocrisy of the self-satisfied middle-class man, the attractions of forbidden fruit and the pretence of sticking to 'old' ways and morals. The protagonist's attempt to impose his traditional mindset on the city is doomed to failure and, like Héva in *A szellem kalandorai*, he retires to the comfort of domesticity.

Budapest is a vanity fair throughout the four novels, and shows no mercy to those who try to bend the rules. In this respect, the city is not so much a den of sin as a stiflingly conservative place where one is surrounded by ample inspiration to dream, and no more. Relations between men and women rarely allow true love to flourish; happiness and a feeling of belonging remain elusive, and equality between the sexes does not exist. The city is left wanting unity and coherence, protagonists disappointed in their own sex, and simultaneously trapped and animated by the rigid demarcation lines between the public and private. In these novels one finds very little evidence for the 'feminisation' or 'judaisation' of society, notions so beloved of Weininger and his followers at the turn of the century, but instead neurosis brought about by frenziedly chasing ideals inspired by the idlest group in Hungarian society, the gentry. Budapest is certainly the site where these tensions

are realised most dramatically. If there is one overarching theme which unites these novels by such a disparate collection of authors, it is the search for an authentic, viable and meaningful existence in the city. Budapest, which appears as a form of 'encoded desire',⁸⁸ seduces its inhabitants with the promise of liberation, but they are disappointed. Their quest for a new morality is inspired and defeated by the city. The fear of contamination by unchecked novelty expressed in *A kristálynézők* and *A szellem kalandorai* is transformed into a utopia, which is doomed to failure.

In the final chapter, I shall discuss novels depicting Budapest at the time of the revolutions of 1918/19.

⁸⁸ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes*, p. 205.

Chapter Four

The Order of Budapest: The Revolutions of 1918/19

Introduction

In this chapter I shall discuss three works written between 1918 and 1926 that provide contrasting portrayals of the events surrounding the two Hungarian revolutions of 1918-19. Their authors are not usually mentioned together in the same sentence. The first is Dezső Szabó (1879-1945), a complex and imposing writer whose prodigious output and experiments with race theory, Zolaesque Naturalism, and the cult of the writer continue to exert a substantial influence today. The second is Cécile Tormay (1876-1937), remembered less for her novels than for her brand of ultra-nationalist feminism, the establishment of the journal *Napkelet* (East) to counteract the influence of *Nyugat*, and her rabid antisemitism. The third is, like Szabó, one of the giants of modern Hungarian literature, Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936), a maverick novelist, poet and journalist whose playful humour, critical eye and distrust of partisan literature do not exactly place him at the opposite end of the political scale from Szabó and Tormay - he was far too wily for that - but who, for these purposes, provides a more cynical vision of the city. A more conformist approach to these works and their authors might classify them in terms of classic polar oppositions, with Szabó and Tormay representing the right-wing anti-Budapest tradition, Kosztolányi the left-liberal cosmopolitan. I should like, however, to move beyond traditional local receptions of these works. In all three works, Budapest is undoubtedly the political centre of Hungary. One might group Szabó and Tormay together, but this would be because of their attempt to impose a monologic narrative on Budapest, an attempt that necessarily fails. Kosztolányi's novel, on the other hand, subverts the desire to delineate spaces of proper order.

The Dual Monarchy was dissolved on October 23, 1918 with the resignation of the Hungarian Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle. A new government consisting of the Independence and 1848 Party, Social Democrats, and assorted middle-class radicals was formed by Count Mihály Károlyi on October 31, the same day that former conservative Prime Minister István Tisza was assassinated in his Budapest home. The armistice was signed at Padua on November 3, and Hungary was proclaimed an independent republic under Károlyi's National

Council on November 16. Among the government's first pieces of legislation were a new election law which extended the franchise to all men and the majority of women over the age of twenty-one who had been Hungarian citizens for at least six years, and the introduction of an eight-hour working day, following pressure from unions. Meanwhile, secret organisations were founded by members of the officer corps, among them the Hungarian National Defence Association (*Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület*, MOVE)¹, the Association of Awakening Hungarians (*Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete*, ÉME) and the Hungarian Militia Association under Gyula Gömbös, who would later take Hungary into alliance with Italy in 1934 during his premiership (October 1, 1932 – October 6, 1936). Károlyi became President of the Republic on January 11, 1919. Land reforms were introduced on January 16, which expropriated, with some compensation, all estates over 3,000 hectares, and distributed them to small-holders and landless farmers. Both landowners and recipients of land complained, the latter at the paucity size of their new plots, and a government programme of land seizures began in March. Mounting political unrest, much of it motivated by antisemitism,² hastened the introduction of the Law for the Protection of the Republic, which gave substantial powers to the Minister of the Interior against those who were considered a danger to the state. It was primarily used to harass and intern members of right-wing groups, and to a lesser extent the burgeoning underground Communist movement, the leaders of which were arrested on February 21.

When the outcome of the February 26 Peace Conference, which entailed a substantial territorial revision of Hungary, became known on March 20, Károlyi's government collapsed. The following day, the establishment of a Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed under Béla Kun. Radical reforms were rushed through according to the policy of 'immediate socialism' inspired by Lenin's *State and Revolution* and the Comintern, including the seizure and nationalisation of medium and large estates on 3 April, as well as the property of the Church, banks, and the

¹ Gömbös was chosen as president of MOVE on January 19, 1919, and was later the first Hungarian politician to describe himself as a 'Hungarian National Socialist'. MOVE declared itself to be 'fajvédő, keresztény és nemzeti szellemű': orientated towards race-protection (*Rassenschutz*), and Christian and national in spirit.

² The slogans 'Down with the Jewish ministers' and 'Death to Böhm and Pogány' were already being heard in January, at the Transylvanian National Council's meeting in a Budapest theatre.

peasant farmers.³ Elections were held on 10 April, although with only one list of candidates, that of the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*). All educational institutions were nationalised; school fees were abolished; secondary school attendance was made compulsory until the age of 14; and the separation of Church and State was declared. The Commune's declaration of support for the arts⁴ was embraced, if only temporarily, by many writers and artists. For one, Gyula Krúdy asked, 'Why should I weep for the life of yesteryear? Should I feel sorry for the jewels that belonged to others? [...] Why should I feel sorry for yesterday's Budapest, the pickpocket, smelly, foul Budapest, the old Hungary that was perfidious to all her worthy sons, and ripe for execution for her sins?'⁵ But by May 1 the Commune was already close to collapse: southern Hungary was occupied by Serbian troops, the Czechoslovak Army was advancing in the north and the Romanians had crossed the river Tisza. The Anti-Bolshevik Committee was formed in Szeged on 3 June by Counts Gyula Károlyi and Pál Teleki, and Admiral Miklós Horthy, with the intention to form a counter-revolutionary government. Meanwhile, the notorious 'Lenin Boys' under Tibor Szamuely conducted executions of anti-Communists across the country.⁶ The Commune could not survive, and collapsed on August 1, 1919. Romanian troops entered Budapest on 3 August and remained until November 16, when Admiral Horthy arrived on horseback to announce the establishment of a Christian and national counter-revolution. The subsequent 'White Terror' lasted until the spring of 1921; during it

³ Praise came quickly from on high. 'The policy of the Hungarian Government was most firm and so Communist in trend, that while we began with workers' control of industry and only gradually began to socialise industry, Béla Kun [...] could at once pass a law which converted all the industrial undertakings in Hungary that were run on capitalist lines into public property'. Lenin, 'The Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky', cited in Tibor Hajdu, *The Hungarian Soviet Republic*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1979, p. 46.

⁴ György (Georg) Lukács, Cultural Commissar under the Commune, wrote: 'The dictatorship of the proletariat made sure that it did not treat any trend, be it obsolete or current, as official. The aim was to spread culture, and to raise working people to the level to decide what there was in the art and culture of the past and present they had need of, and what they could do without. Every fight about so-called official art was about this. The Kassák group, for instance, always claimed to be recognised as the official art of the dictatorship, and that claim – it must be said – was always rejected by the People's Commissariat. On the other hand it defended Kassák's lot against social democratic attempts to suppress them'. *Társadalmi Szemle*, March 1969, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵ Gyula Krúdy writing in Gyula Károlyi's paper *Magyarország*, 9 April 1919, cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

⁶ According to the Hungarian Lexicon of Jewry, 590 people were executed, of whom 44 (7.4%) were Jews. *Magyar zsidó lexikon*, ed. by Péter Újvári, Budapest, Magyar zsidó lexikon, 1929, p. 290.

approximately 5,000 were executed, 75,000 imprisoned and around 100,000 left Hungary, most of whom were intellectuals, socialists and middle-class Jews.⁷

The two revolutions provided the ideologues of the Horthy era with a rich seam of horror stories to be mined of Red bogeymen, indeed of anything vaguely resembling left-wing and liberal politics, an inextricable association of Jews with socialism, revolution and anti-national subversion, and an Other against which the Christian, national and conservative line could be defined and defended.

Szabó and the Cult of the Writer-warrior

One of the most influential early twentieth-century writers, Dezső Szabó was born in 1879 in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Transylvania) into a Protestant family. His father was a local government clerk. After completing grammar school in his home town and failing to gain entry to the prestigious Eötvös Kollégium teacher-training college in Budapest, he worked as a private tutor and legal clerk for a year before finally being accepted at the Kollégium where he enrolled to specialise in French and Hungarian, but instead dedicated himself to studying Finno-Ugric linguistics. Qualifying as a teacher in 1904, he spent 1905-06 in Paris on a scholarship and then returned to Hungary to teach. His name was synonymous with controversy from the start: his publication of antisemitic articles in local papers forced him to move from Székesfehérvár to Nagyvárád in 1908, where he met his fellow-teacher, the poet Gyula Juhász (1883-1937) and began to acquaint himself with progressive literary trends. He joined the teachers' movement for higher pay, and made his name nationally with an open letter to István Tisza in *Nyugat* in 1911, in which he railed against the former Prime Minister's 'feudal' and thus, according to Szabó,

⁷ Among them were Béla Kun, Jenő Landler, György (Georg) Lukács, Jenő Varga, Vilmos Böhm, Zsigmond Kunfi, Ernő Garami, Mihály Károlyi, Oszkár Jászi, Pál Szende, Károly (Karl) Mannheim, Károly (Karl) Polányi, Sándor (Alexander) Korda, László Moholy-Nagy, Lajos Kassák and Béla Balázs.

anti-national tendencies.⁸ From then on he contributed to both *Nyugat* and *Huszadik Század*, and moved from teaching post to teaching post under police surveillance. He spent the summers of 1912 and 1913 in Paris, the 1912 trip sponsored by *Nyugat*. He initially welcomed the revolution of October 1918 and moved to Budapest, but fled to Lőcse as soon as the communists seized power in March 1919, where he wrote *Az elsodort falu* (The Village that was Swept Away).⁹ This, his second novel, is often described as the epitome of the victorious counter-revolutionary worldview, and even the most influential text of the interwar period. He returned to Budapest at the start of Horthy's regency in November 1919, established the Hungarian Writers' Association and served as its president for a time. The principal contributor to *Iffak Szava* (Words of Youth), *Virradat* (Dawn) and *Auróra*, which later became *Élet és irodalom* (Life and Literature), Szabó was the darling of the counter-revolutionary world until 1922-23 when he began to criticise the regime because the balance of political power was still weighed against the peasantry. He left Hungary in 1924 for Italy and then France, returning in 1925 disillusioned, embittered and increasingly given to egotistic monomania: in younger intellectual circles the cult of Dezső Szabó was still alive and well, but the era of official endorsement had passed. His theoretical writings culminated in 'Új magyar ideológia felé' (Towards a New Hungarian Ideology), in *Előőrs* (Advance Guard) in 1928, in which he railed against the aristocracy (epitomised by both Tisza and Károlyi) and the Jews, and proposed an anti-capitalist association of small Danube Basin and Balkan states to unite against the political and economic weight of Germany, Russia and the Jews. By this point he had already isolated himself from his peers, thanks to his public criticisms of, amongst others, Kosztolányi, Babits and Bethlen. Szabó enjoyed something of a revival in the 1930s when the Populists appointed him to their holy trinity of inspiring writers

⁸ Dezső Szabó, 'Válasz nagyméltóság gróf Tisza István volt miniszterelnök, nagybirtokos úrnak', *Nyugat*, 9, 1 May 1911, pp. 809-13, reprinted in *Nyugat 1908-1929*, ed. Kenyeres, pp. 101-04. This was a response to Tisza's article 'Szabadgondolkodás' in which he argued that freedom of thought must be protected from 'free thinkers'. Szabó reclaimed the moral high ground from the landowning classes and their calls for idealistic patriotism which, he wrote, only served to protect their privileges. Claiming that starvation and debt cause bodies and national feeling to wither away, he demanded an improvement in material conditions for those whose work builds the nation's future, unlike those who merely own acres of land and are thus against the homeland (*hazaellenes*).

⁹ I devote more time to this novel because it was the most influential work of the interwar period, it is mistakenly interpreted as a literary rejection of the city, and it contains all the clichés and contradictions of urban narratives of the period.

alongside Endre Ady and Zsigmond Móricz,¹⁰ but in a display of characteristic bloody-mindedness, he did not contribute to the *népi-urbánus vita*, preferring instead to publish his eclectic theories in *Szabó Dezső újabb művei* (Newer Works of Dezső Szabó), the *Ludas Mátyás Füzetek* (Mátyás Ludas Pamphlets), and his collection of political writings *Az egész látóhatár* (The Whole Horizon), published by Sándor Püski in 1939. Like Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky to whose racist journal *Előőrs* he had contributed in the late 1920s, Szabó gave Jew-baiting a tactical rest once he realised the seriousness of the Third Reich's designs on central Europe, came to oppose German military and political might, and spent the last years of his life agitating against Nazism, before dying in a basement during the siege of Budapest in 1945.

As this brief biography illustrates, Szabó's thought and writing are not easy to pin down or categorise, not least because he changed his ideas with the season, something he freely acknowledged. In his foreword to the 1944 edition of *Az elsodort falu*, Szabó writes that 'now that I have to write the foreword to the critical edition, I see how many centuries and how many Dezső Szabós have passed in these twenty-five years'.¹¹ He preferred to provoke and appal to offering even vaguely sensible, coherent solutions to the pressing questions of his day. Throughout his creative life there were but two constants: his endless self-admiration, and his hatred of Jews and Germans. To wit: one of his favourite sayings was that there were three great writers in the world, Balzac, Dostoevsky and, although modesty prevented him from revealing the identity of the third, himself. 'If Balzac dared to write the *Comédie humaine*, then why shouldn't I; I am

¹⁰ For a glowing account of Szabó's pioneering work and undeniable influence on the Populists, see Borbándi, *A magyar népi mozgalom*. The Populists believed that Szabó's and Móricz's works were so profoundly important because they did not paint an idyllic, nineteenth-century picture of village life. Instead, peasants were depicted as petty, proud, cold, insensitive, jealous, aggressive, and at war with their environment and their lords. More important, both writers suggested that the solution to the peasants' problems would heal the ills of society as a whole. See Móricz, *Sárarany* (1910), *Galamb papné* (1912) and *Árvalányok* (1918). László Németh wrote in 1932 that the Populists' 'conception of the world was essentially gained from and formed through argument with him'. 'Világképüket lényegében tőle kapva, vele vitatkozva alakították ki', László Németh, 'Visszatekintés', *Tanú*, 1932, I, p. 259, cited in Borbándi, *A magyar népi mozgalom*, p. 137.

¹¹ '1919. május 23-án jelent meg "Az elsodort falu" első kiadása. És most, hogy a kritikai kiadás elé előszót kell írnom, látom: hogy e huszonöt év alatt hány század és hány Szabó Dezső múlt el'. Dezső Szabó, 'Előszó a kritikai kiadáshoz' in Dezső Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, Budapest, Püski, 1999, p. 5.

as great a writer'.¹² Never one to aim low, Szabó believed that writing was a 'life-building deed' (*életépítő tett*) and, as a writer of peerless vision and insight, Hungary's salvation and future path would be realised in his works. He admired and envied Ady's talent and, as a firm believer in the existence of Hungarian genius, appointed himself alongside his elder fellow-writer to the role of tragic national prophet. Szabó, while undoubtedly inspired, was a heavy-handed novelist, publicist and essayist, whose prose swerved wildly between extremes of cloying sentimentality, racist bile and crude sarcasm, all the while employing contrived free-association techniques through unashamed overuse of the word *mintha* (as if), and perplexing verbal gymnastics. A case in point is the typical *szabódezsős*¹³ sentence from *Az elsodort falu*, following the youngest daughter of the impoverished priest's request for new shoes once the war is over:

She uttered this request like someone wishing pleasant weather for tomorrow's May Day celebrations. This request, cried out there on the five stigmata of tortured, brain-masturbated, bleeding humanity. That request was the sole prayer of three hundred million mouths, the gasping breath of three hundred million pairs of lungs, and which a couple of hundred fists could beat back, day in, day out, into the breast of the trembling millions.¹⁴

Szabó declared his proximity and antipathy to all 'isms',¹⁵ but in practice he was an eclectic who borrowed freely from nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual trends that he believed complemented his worldview, whatever that was at the time. As János Gyurgyák notes, his writings flirted with, in turn, Catholic Modernism, nineteenth-century radical liberalism, *Rassenschutz*, Populism, and finally, the anti-Nazi movement.¹⁶ While this is not the place to debate his theoretical and political meanderings, it should suffice to say that in the early 1920s, with *Az elsodort falu*, Szabó succeeded in further popularising, radicalising

¹² 'Ha Balzac meg merte írni az *Emberi Komédiát* [...], miért ne merném én is; vagyok akkora író'. Szabó cited in Gyula Gombos, *Szabó Dezső*, Munich, Auróra, 1966, p. 176.

¹³ The adjective *szabódezsős*, 'Szabó Dezső-esque', was first used as early as 1919 in *Nyugat* reviews.

¹⁴ 'Úgy mondta ki ezt a kívánságot, mint aki a holnapi majálisra szép időt kíván. Ezt a kívánságot, mely ott kiáltott a meggyőtt, agyonmaszturbált, vérző emberiség öt stigmáján. Azt a kívánságot, mely háromszáz millió szájnak egyetlen imája, háromszáz millió tüdő lihegő lélegzete volt s amelyet egypár száz ököl napról napra vissza tudott verni a vonagló milliók mellébe'. Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, p. 320.

¹⁵ Dezső Szabó, *Egyenes úton*, Budapest, Génus, 1920, p. 5.

¹⁶ See Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, pp. 554-59.

and spiritualising antisemitism with his own eccentric brand of what Antal Szerb termed in 1935 ‘expressionist *Rassenschutz*’.¹⁷

Before discussing the novel in greater depth, two questions deserve closer attention. First, his antisemitism. Szabó’s views on the ‘Jewish Question’ changed regularly. By the 1910s, the Herderian idea of a natural role and place for each *Volk* was already well entrenched in his mind. In 1914 he wrote his oft-cited article ‘The organic localisation of the Hungarian’ for *Huszadik Század*, in which he stated that the fate of Jewry was inseparably linked with that of *magyarság*: ‘Jewish spiritual and material life has interwoven with so many roots into Hungarian life that the question of its future, development and localisation is one of *magyarság*’s most vital fundamental problems’.¹⁸ The article explored solutions to the problem of the Jews’ alien mentality, and concluded that Hungarian Jews could follow one of two paths. They could remain isolated from and foreign to the national body, or they could act as the cement in creating a new, productive community of Hungary’s national minorities.¹⁹ For this to happen, however, the Jew must kill Jehovah, Jewish law, the Old Testament and the Talmud, and embrace his own ‘wondrous creative strength’. Not surprisingly, reaction from representatives of the Jewish community was lukewarm. The orthodox rabbi Izsák Pfeiffer responded in the next edition of *Huszadik Század* that first, Szabó knew nothing about the diversity within the Hungarian Jewish community, and second, his unconscious antisemitism was nothing more than a modern formulation of the ‘one pen, one pastor’ principle. Szabó was already using terms such as ‘alien blood’, ‘miscegenation’ and ‘racially lethal poison’.²⁰

¹⁷ ‘Szabó Dezső a húszas évek elején: expresszionista fajvédelem’. Szerb, *Magyar irodalom története*, p. 494.

¹⁸ ‘[A] zsidóság lelki és anyagi élete annyi gyökérrel szövődött bele a magyar életbe, hogy jövőjének, fejlődésének, elhelyezkedésének kérdése egyike a magyarság vitális alapproblémáinak’. Dezső Szabó, ‘A magyar organikus elhelyezkedése’, *Huszadik Század*, 1914, 1, pp. 340-07, cited in Gyurgák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, p. 555.

¹⁹ ‘Legyen – mondja Szabó – a hazai zsidóság *cement*, amely egy új, termékeny közösségbe forrasztja Magyarországnak népeit’. *Ibid.*, p. 556.

²⁰ As far back as Győző Istóczy’s establishment of the Országos Antiszemita Párt (National Antisemitic Party) in 1883, the terms ‘blood’ and ‘race’ were used to denote biological, rather than cultural, difference.

Szabó later subscribed to the popular perception that Jews profited from the Great War, and *Az elsodort falu* was his version of the *Dolchstoßlegende* offered up to the eager domestic market. In the foreword to the second edition published in October 1919, he wrote: ‘I was the cry which broke from the lips of the stabbed-in-the-back race, and *magyarság* recognised its own wounded life in this novel’.²¹ Despite his close dealings with Jews in Budapest throughout the 1910s, Szabó proved unable, because he was unwilling, to see the individual Jew as anything other than the representative of his or her noxious race and, like László Németh, later discarded his first-hand experiences and friendships for a more expedient stance. In 1920, he wrote:

Scratch the surface of the ‘most cultured’ Jew who reads Maeterlinck in the morning, recites Paul Claudel at noon, and gargles with Tolstoy in the evening: underneath the ‘European’ epidermis you will find the eternal Jew untouched, the ferocious Jehovah, the steely native of the dreadful Talmud who, with the unconscious eternal instinct of blood and nerves, sees, hears, touches, smells, tastes, loves and hates in the fundamental questions of life in exactly the same way as every other individual creature of his race.²²

György Csepeli notes that the Populists were either children of the ‘servant-class’ who had personal experience of social inequalities, or second-generation intellectuals. In either instance, the ‘basis for self-consciousness for such writers consisted of a certain nostalgia and attempts to solve the problem of personal insecurity. Part of this self-realisation was a feeling of false security acquired through anti-Semitism’.²³ Likewise for Szabó, Jews, some of whom had published and supported him financially, turned out to be nothing more than members of the conspiracy to strangle genuine talent, and dictate the shallow and fickle literary tastes of Pest society. The figure of Géza Sarkadi-Schönberger in *Az elsodort falu* is a transparent, and deeply unkind portrait of the writer and critic Baron Lajos

²¹ ‘Én voltam a hátbadöfött faj ajakáról kitört jaj s a magyarság megismerte saját megsebzett életét e regényben’. Szabó, ‘Előszó a második kiadáshoz’ in *Az elsodort falu*, pp. 6-11 (p. 6).

²² ‘Kapard meg a “legkultúrabb” zsidót, aki reggel Maeterlincket olvas, délben Paul Claudel szaval, este Tolsztojt gargarizál: az “európai” epidermis alatt megtalálod az érintetlen őszidót, az ádáz Jehovát, a rettenetes Talmud acélos bennszülöttjét, aki a vérnek, az idegeknek tudatlan őszidónősségével az élet alapkérdéseiben faja minden egyedével azonosan lát, hall, tapint, szagol, ízlel, szeret és gyűlöl’. Dezső Szabó, ‘Ellenforradalom’, *Virradat*, December 29, 1920, p. 1.

²³ György Csepeli, ‘In the Captivity of Narratives: The political socialisation of populist writers in Hungary, and the origins of national narratives in Eastern Europe’ in Joseph Held (ed.), *Populism in Eastern Europe: Racism, Nationalism and Society*, Boulder CO, 1996, pp. 129-143 (pp. 122-3).

Hatvany, who funded *Nyugat* from its outset, championed Ady and Attila József, and served on Károlyi's National Council in 1918 before fleeing Hungary in 1919. In interwar Hungary, the antisemite was in a double bind: Jews had created new fora for modern literature, discovered and pioneered the twentieth-century greats, but were also to be blamed for controlling and exploiting true, that is, Christian, genius. In conclusion, I argue that, like Cécile Tormay whose *Outlaw's Diary* I will discuss next, Szabó was responsible for the propagation in the early 1920s of the notion that a race war, a struggle for survival until death, was being waged between Jews and non-Jews. But unlike Tormay, for whom Jews were an exclusively destructive force, Szabó's writings reveal a belief that the Jew creates and builds, is continually active in financial and intellectual trade, and busies himself with construction schemes, upon which the non-Jewish writer initially depends, but later comes to resent. The exploitation of this resentment was also a handy career move: moaning about Jews and playing the martyr will always sell books in Hungary.

The second question which is key to understanding Szabó's worldview is his love for Paris. The publication of his antisemitic articles while teaching at provincial grammar schools, which forced his move from one town to another, finally resulted in his trip on a scholarship to Paris from Nagyvárad, which he later described as his road to Damascus. 'Because you should know what decisive significance my mother and first town of birth had for me. (The second one was Paris.)'²⁴ Even more so than the abundance of unpretentious young intellectuals, pretty girls, politeness, and generous portions of good food at low prices,²⁵ what impressed Szabó most and gave Paris its greatest charm and everlasting attraction was 'that it was the capital of the world, and yet also a gentle, civic *small town* living according to its old traditions, with all the amiability of small towns defended from [the long arm of] human culture'.²⁶ Parisians were cultured, yet

²⁴ 'Mert tudhatják, milyen döntő jelentőségű volt rám édesanyám és első szülővárosom. (A második Párizs volt.)' Dezső Szabó, *Életeim, születéseim, halálaim, feltámadásaim*, vol. 2 [1944], Budapest, Püski, 1996, p. 729.

²⁵ Szabó was a rotund man. Physically, he reminds one of Diederich Hessling in Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* (1918): *ein weiches Kind*. Tibor Szervátiusz's bronze sculpture of Szabó's head also bears more than a passing resemblance to Renato Bertelli's *Profilo continuo del Duce* (Continuous Profile of the Duce, 1933).

²⁶ 'Mert az, ami talán a legnagyobb varázsát és elszakíthatatlan vonzóerejét adta Párizsnak, az volt: hogy a világ fővárosa volt és: szelíd, régi hagyományokon élő polgári *kisváros*, a hosszú emberi

friendly and honest, genuine citizens who made one feel at home instantly. For Szabó, like so many other Hungarian and east European writers in the 1910s of all political persuasions, Paris was the synthesis of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*,²⁷ where authentic, primary relations between people nevertheless depended on literacy and shared high culture. Szabó despised Budapest, the city divided against itself, without which, however, he could not have made his name or propagated his tirades against cosmopolitan urban life. Paris, on the other hand, was his promised land, a *Civitas Dei*, and the site of his self-discovery. In other words, Paris was his metropolis, his mother city, while Budapest was his cosmopolis, inextricably associated with Jews, competition, pretentiousness and fake sentiment. In 'Polgári kisváros', the diary of his first trip to Paris,²⁸ Szabó is nevertheless impressed by the international character of the French capital, where one could meet anyone in a small bistro, from a soprano Swedish girl to the deepest bass Negro. Satisfying and stimulating conversations were to be had with local residents on park benches, in cafés, buses and shops. Perhaps nowhere else in the world did people make one feel at home so quickly: one did not find pretentiousness, conceit and similar rubbish here.²⁹ He recounts one jolly conversation about foreigners in Paris with a market woman, a senator in the Upper House, a senior civil servant and two workers on a long bus journey. There was no obsequiousness; no deferential terms were used: 'When we alighted, everyone shook hands with one another and it really did not look as if anyone regarded themselves as 'Sir', 'his lordship' or any

kultúrától védett kisvárosok minden kedvességével'. Dezső Szabó, 'Polgári kisváros' (1905) in Endre Lázár Bajomi (ed.), *A magyar Párizs*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1978, pp. 118-122 (p. 120).

²⁷ Ferdinand Tönnies's influential work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* was first published in 1887 but only gained recognition with the printing of the second edition in 1912. Tönnies's ideas were nothing new. A contrast between two types of social organisation, and mentality, the former based on family and friendship, the latter on rational will and contract, can be found in Confucius (small tranquility and great similarity), Plato (the Republic and oligarchy), St Augustine (City of God and City of Man), Hegel (family society and civic society) and Durkheim (mechanical and organic solidarity). But for Tönnies, both forms of human association were based on will (natural and rational respectively), and *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were only ideal types, the former representing the youth, the latter the adulthood of society. Neither did or could exist in empirically pure form to the exclusion of the other. His early twentieth-century interpreters, however, among them Werner Sombart, found his ideas much more pleasingly simple, and wrote volumes on the triumph of capitalism as 'the replacement of a concrete, particularist, Christian *Gemeinschaft* by an abstract, universalised, judaised *Gesellschaft*'. Muller, *The Mind and the Market*, p. 254.

²⁸ Dezső Szabó, 'Polgári kisváros', pp. 118-22.

²⁹ 'Nagyképüség, úrhatnáságot s más efféle mocskot itt nem találtál'. Ibid., p. 120.

other such obscenity'.³⁰ He adds that the only time he was reminded of his former boss was at the zoo, seeing the llamas strutting around with five-star arrogance.³¹ And no time in Paris would be complete without visiting Père Lachaise to commune with the dead. Guided by the 'French spirit', Szabó instinctively finds all the graves he seeks.

Paris was the site of self-realisation, and inspired the Hungarian writer to return home and revolutionise Hungarian literature. In a similar vein, in his influential article entitled 'Sasfiók' (The Eaglet), Móricz announced in 1911 that his head had been spinning in Paris, from the city itself and

that crazy contrast between man and the realisation of his life, which in Paris exists in the most wonderful harmony. Because this is the only true city. It is great in the small things and small in the great things, like man himself. In Paris everyone feels good because Paris is the city of humanity! And people cannot live with such human dignity anywhere else – only on the plains of Hortobágy. Only in these two places did I see that people could live alongside each other in absolute peace.³²

This is the key to both Szabó's and Móricz's love of Paris: it is a big city that reminds them of the naturalness and authenticity they attributed to the Hungarian countryside. In a theatre, Móricz describes the audience's rapturous response to the play as akin to an irresistible phenomenon of nature, a tidal wave, and puts this down to the strength of French national spirit. He is initially jealous, and can only think of transporting this collective feeling back to Hungary, until he realises that the Hungarians' history, so radically different from that of the French, would not allow for such childish enthusiasm. For both writers, the centre of their Paris monologues is themselves, and the historical mission they realise they must bear

³⁰ 'Mikor leszálltunk, mindnyájan kezet szorítottunk egymással, és igazán nem látszott, hogy "nagyságosnak", "méltóságosnak" vagy más efféle disznóságnak érzi magát'. Ibid., p. 121.

³¹ 'Az én volt főigazgatómhoz hasonló alakulatot itt csak az állatkertben láttam. A lámák igen ötödik-fizetésosztályú gőggel sétáltak a maguk rekeszében. De ezeknek nem volt semmi kapcsolatuk a francia közoktatással'. Ibid.

³² 'Abba az örületes kontrasztba, amely az ember és életének megnyilvánulása közt van, s amely Párisban van a legsodálatosabb harmóniában. Mert ez egyetlen igazi város. Ez nagy a kicsinyekben és kicsiny a nagyban, mint maga az ember. Párisban mindenki jól érzi magát, mert Páris az emberiség városa! És az emberek nem is tudnak úgy élni sehol, olyan emberi méltósággal, mint Párisban – csak még a hortobágyi pusztán. Csak ezen a két helyen láttam, hogy az emberek abszolút nyugalommal tudnak élni egymás mellett'. Zsigmond Móricz, 'Sasfiók', *Nyugat*, 1911, 23, pp. 937-43 reprinted in *Nyugat 1908-1929*, ed. Kenyeres, pp. 117-22 (p. 117).

upon return to the homeland.³³ The importance of living in Paris for the development of Szabó's worldview is twofold: first, he believed it was a large, international city which was a small, friendly town at heart, a mother figure, a synthesis of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and conspicuously free of malign Jewish influence; and second, his already not inconsiderable ego received an enormous boost there, which convinced him that he had to return to Hungary and fight for 'the truth' and justice.

I will now discuss *Az elsodort falu* in greater detail and suggest that although the novel might appear to present an irrefutable opposition between corrupt Budapest and pure Transylvanian village, it should not be interpreted as an all-out attack on the city. Rather, it represents the pinnacle of the urban intelligentsia's revolt against the loneliness they felt in the cosmopolis, and the association of earthly sustenance with racial clarity, and was addressed to an urban, educated readership who, like Szabó, 'sensed in liberalism the source of all their inner sufferings'.³⁴ In other words, it is a plea to reform the body, soul and environment of the cultured reader, by means of internalising an idealised negation of the capital city.

³³ Numerous Hungarian writers of all artistic and political persuasions underwent a similar self-realisation in Paris. Illyés, for one, claimed that he learned to be a writer not in the Café de la Paix (where the bohemian bums were) but in the National Library of France. Gyula Illyés, 'Szellemi vérvád' (Intellectual Blood Libel), *Magyar Hírlap*, 3 June 1934, reprinted in Nagy (ed.), *A népi-urbánus vita dokumentumai*, pp. 112-5. Kassák also claimed in his autobiography *Egy ember élete* that only Paris gave him the freedom to be himself. Unlike Szabó, Móricz and Illyés however, Kassák found Budapest insufferably small, provincial and boring; in a word, too Hungarian. See Lajos Kassák, *Egy ember élete*, 2 vols., Budapest, Magvető, 1957.

³⁴ Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, p. xii.

Az elsodort falu: Writing and Reception

Szabó's second novel was first published on May 23, 1919 in two volumes, two months and two days into the Commune. Szabó had welcomed the October 1918 revolution and, although he maintained for the rest of his life that some form of radical upheaval had been necessary, the dictatorship of the proletariat soon met with his unequivocal disapproval, and he took flight from communist Budapest for Transylvania. This colossal novel was written in under five months, and it certainly shows. The novel is a chaotic mix of stream-of-consciousness free association occasionally bordering on the psychotic, and rabid diatribes against Szabó's favourite targets (namely, Jews, Germans, 'free competition', that is, the market economy, urban élites, democracy, and modernity in general), barely held together by an entirely haphazard structure into which entirely irrelevant events are crammed only in order to sate Szabó's rage. His endless self-regard is expressed through an 'expressionistic style [that] revealed both his limitless energy and his inability to exercise creative discipline', not to mention his 'enormous and aggressive vocabulary [which] baffled his numerous opponents now with its resourceful innuendos, now with vitriolic accusations'.³⁵ While not pacifist by any stretch of the imagination, *Az elsodort falu* is none the less a powerful anti-war novel. Szabó's disgust at the senseless killing comes through strongly enough, but it is further embellished by his antisemitism (Jews profited financially from the war in which they did not fight), his peculiar chauvinism (Hungarian peasant lads were sufficiently daft, patriotic and misguided to volunteer for service at the front, unlike Slovaks, Serbs, and Germans) and his fascination with male camaraderie, homoeroticism and violence.

³⁵ Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1986, p. 383. Szabó's writing, by no means only this novel, is often extraordinarily difficult to render in English without making it sound nonsensical. The bombastic purple prose so beloved by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Hungarian (and German, such as Max Weber or Oswald Spengler) writers employed long sentences, extravagant subclauses and wild metaphors which can sound clumsy, if not garbled and hysterical, in English. I give the original Hungarian in the footnotes.

In his own words, the aim of *Az elsodort falu* was to achieve a totality, a 'universal synthesis' of life. In the foreword to the 1944 edition, he offered a distinction between novels inspired by 'primitive stylisation', and syntheses of the most influential modern literary trends, modestly placing his own work in the latter category, alongside *War and Peace*. Reactions to the novel's publication were immediate, diverse, and unfailingly strong. Described by Miklós Kállay as 'the most fantastic Hungarian book', a synthesis of Hogarth, Brueghel, d'Annunzio, Michelangelo and Rodin's Balzac, by Kálmán Harsányi (whom Szabó admired) and László Cholnoky as an achievement of historical rather than literary importance, but by Lajos Fülep in *Nyugat* as a textbook example of precisely how not to write a novel,³⁶ it was embraced as a bible by right-wing Boy Scout groups, periodicals to which Szabó contributed, and even, according to Pál Ignóty, underground Communist Party circles, who chose to ignore the novel's anti-Communist message.³⁷ Certainly the most influential and popular novel of the inter-war period, it is regarded in Hungarian literary criticism as Szabó's eulogy to the *Volk* and war-cry for the battle against the urban intelligentsia. It is rightly described as an uneven, over-ambitious, sprawling and 'utopian-reactionary' work grounded in literary and 'linguistic expressionism', race theory and Szabó's indomitable ego. The novel 'celebrated the ancestral vigour of the peasantry and castigated the town for its corrupting influence',³⁸ and its hero is the figure of János Böjthe, through whom Szabó's messianic complex is given physical form. Sadly, János is a 'paper tiger, or at best a Jókaiesque super-hero'.³⁹ Szabó took on all comers. In the foreword to the 1944 edition, following a brief treatise on the spiritual particularities of *magyarság*, he lists the criticisms levelled against his novel: (i) it is pleasant, but not a novel; (ii) it boasts a poor structure and has no hero; (iii) well-known public figures appear; (iv) Böjthe is an improbable Jókai-

³⁶ Miklós Kállay, 'Az elsodort falu', *Kis Krónika*, September 23 1919, p. 15; Kálmán Harsányi in *Új Magyar Szemle*, 1920, I, pp. 225-33, both cited in Péter Nagy, *Szabó Dezső*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1964, p. 235; László Cholnoky, 'Elsodort falu', *Pesti Futár*, November 28 1919, pp. 12-3; and Lajos Fülep, 'Szabó Dezső regénye', *Nyugat*, 1919, 16-17, pp. 1020-1036 (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/human/szepirod/magyar/nyugat/html/doc/09349.htm>).

³⁷ See Ungvári, *Ahasvérus és Shylock*, pp. 268-9.

³⁸ Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, 'The Age of Bourgeois Society, 1920 to 1948. II. Intellectual Life' in László Kósa (ed.), *A Cultural History of Hungary In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Budapest, Corvina, 2000, pp. 211-48 (p. 212).

³⁹ Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*, 1986, p. 383.

esque hero; (v) the novel exaggerates the darker side of life; (vi) the novel contains morally offensive scenes; (vii) the language is overstylised and tiring, or, too spontaneous and chaotic; and (viii) it is a *Tendenzroman*. He accuses his critics of living in an ivory tower and his preoccupation with ‘truth’, as defined by him, is his only defence, a tactic used by the Populists in the 1930s. Those who found his depictions of the ‘proletarians of love’ unpalatable he described as ‘cerebral onanists’. It is hardly surprising that Szabó failed to satisfy his elevated goals: ‘The writer’s intention is colossal in scope: to be both redeemer and prophet, chronicler and modern, to solve all Hungarian life’s fundamental problems and to bridge, in one jump, the distance between backwards Hungarian fiction and Western [literature]’.⁴⁰

Dramatis personae

The novel is in three parts. In the first part the reader is introduced to the major characters and to Szabó’s diagnosis of Hungary’s ills which led her into the Great War; the second part is set during the war, in Transylvania, Budapest and at the front; and the final and shortest section, consisting of two chapters, features the resolution of the characters’ fates, and Szabó’s programme for individual, and thus national, revolution in the persons of János Bőjthe and Miklós Farkas. *Az elsodort falu* opens with János’s return to his native village. The twenty-eight-year-old only child of peasant farmers, János cannot be considered a rounded character, even though he is one of the two heroes of the novel. He has already resolved all his personal conflicts before the opening sentence, having spent some time in Paris toying with trendy European ideas, before realising that his calling is to return to the land, marry a peasant girl of the soil and have as many children as possible. He is described as a large, handsome, muscular ‘brown’ man (sickly types, Communists and Jews are ‘yellow’) who has made peace with himself and his race;

⁴⁰ ‘Az író szándéka hatalmas: egyszerre lenni redemptor és vátesz, krónikás és modern; egyszerre megoldani a magyar élet minden alapproblémáját és egy regény ugrásával behozni azt a távolságot, amellyel a magyar széppróza lemaradt a nyugatitól’. Nagy, *Szabó Dezső*, p. 216.

he is the Hercules of the Hungarians, a ‘steel man-column’, the embodiment of strength, will and determination. János boasts a healthy peasant appetite for sex without shame, and despite his initial urge to marry the tragic Judit Farcády, on the grounds that he will redeem her, he eventually marries Mária Barabás, the bovine peasant girl with breasts and hips like the Earth itself. Szabó’s fetish for buxom country lasses is evident throughout, but in the closing chapters when Mária is carrying János’s child, he cannot resist the opportunity to mock her simplicity. Walking round the village, taking pleasure in nature and all the male muscles at work in the field only to protect her, she comes across a child with a lamb: “‘How good it is that there are children, and how good it is that there are lambs,’ Maria would have said, had she been able to say such things’.”⁴¹ Her urges, although she is barely aware of them, are to be, to (pro)create, and to believe. She is the fertile soil in which János’s plans for the future of his race are to be realised. There is nothing else to say about either János or Mária, for they only exist in order to complement each other’s function as the empty vessels into which Szabó poured his fantasies of *Ur-Man* and *Ur-Woman* who resist modern evils like capitalism and imperialism through procreation, thus restoring the natural order of the village.

Far more intriguing are Miklós Farkas, Judit Farcády and her father, the inebriated, luckless village priest Jenő Farcády. While János is the cure for *magyarság*’s sickness, Miklós is the walking, talking collection of its symptoms. He is, it is universally agreed, the Ady figure of the novel, if not the embodiment of Hungarian literature itself. The frustrated genius who goes mad twice in the course of the novel, each time repeatedly shouting ‘Magyar vagyok!’ (I am Hungarian!) as if it were a sanity-delivering mantra, he is torn between literary life in Budapest, his proclivity for under-age girls and hysterical Jewesses, and the redemption he yearns for in the village. A ‘scandal to others, sickness to himself’, it is only in the last chapter that Miklós is able to accept the healing powers of the village once he has exhausted his opportunities in the city. He has four major outbursts in the novel, in the form of interior monologues or arguments with others, and these constitute Szabó’s diatribes against the injustices inbuilt in Hungarian society. The

⁴¹ ‘- Milyen jó, hogy van gyermek és milyen jó, hogy van bárány – mondta volna Mária, ha ilyeneket tudott volna mondani’. Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, p. 383.

first is his fantasy to conquer Budapest and, by extension, ‘the whole of life’. Gazing down over the city from his room in the Castle district, the thought of a new *honfoglalás* seizes his muscles, a democratic revolution brought about not by blows or draconian legislation, but by the ‘inner thrust of instinct’ to ensure that the Hungarian regains his rightful place of dominance in every sphere.⁴² The second is the only speech not to be delivered in Budapest, though the city is its subject. Returning to the village, which is quickly being transformed into a small town thanks to the grocer Old Schönberger’s wartime schemes, a hive of activity with young Jews from the city scurrying about building jam and sauerkraut factories, Miklós confronts the old man. He talks of his most recent novel, the subject of which was the suffering of the Hungarian race under the yoke of an alien middle class, alien press, and alien values. It transpires elsewhere that the only person to have enjoyed and appreciated the prophetic genius of Miklós’s novel is János. His one-time sponsors, the staff at *Kultúra* (a thinly-veiled parody of *Nyugat*), had scorned its decadence. This is interpreted as the Jews turning against Miklós/Szabó when it was in their interests to do so. Feeling like a foreigner in Pest, Miklós explains that he has returned to lick his wounds. He feels nothing but awe for the Jews’ alleged special powers. “‘What a race, what a race! If only we could be like them!’” said Miklós’.⁴³ The third tirade follows the appearance from nowhere of Miklós’s friend Oszkár Gyöngyi. Miklós has just left the sanatorium in Budapest following his second breakdown, when he meets Oszkár who offers him 5,000 crowns, on condition that he should refrain from insulting Jews. Szabó clearly felt the need to present a figure of a self-hating Jew: Oszkár deplores his fellow Jews’ capitalism and pollution through filthy lucre, but asks Miklós to acknowledge that Jews had purchased the right, at great cost, to participate in Hungarian life. They were the miners who had unearthed the treasures of Miklós’s race and announced

⁴² ‘Mint egy damaszkuszi szó úgy villant izmaiba egy új honfoglalás gondolata. [...] Meghódítani az egész életet, úrrá tenni a rablott, balek magyart minden piacon, minden versenyen. De nem ököllel és bitor törvényekkel, nem múlttal hazudni el az új életet, hanem az ösztön belső lökésével, mint egy megszállás, mint egy folyton tettbe égő rögzött gondolat. [...] Egy új, minden eddiginél belsőbb és mozdítóbb forradalmat fújni tüzes széllel az izmokba, a magyar fajt minden versenyképes gondolat, minden alkotó tett, minden egészséges szépség hazájává tenni’. Ibid., p. 83.

⁴³ ‘Micsoda faj, micsoda faj! Ha mi tudnánk ilyenek lenni! – mondta Miklós’. Ibid., p. 237.

them on the world market.⁴⁴ Miklós explodes at the mention of pogroms and attempts to reclaim the monopoly on suffering from Oszkár:

And my race?! Am I not allowed to fear for my race? My race has not suffered enough?! During the war I ended up all over the country. I was at the front, behind it, in villages and towns. I saw all types of people, all types of relations. I was at a spa in summer, in the Tatra, by the Balaton, everywhere where they quaff health and live pleasure. Who was there? Jews, Jews, Jews. Go to the theatres, the places of entertainment, everywhere where they stuff themselves with pleasure. Who enjoys this? Jews, Jews, Jews. Go to the towns, who was raised up out of the dirt by the war, for whom did the war's teat overflow into a milk vat? Who became the lords of life? Jews, Jews, Jews. Look, where does the land flow to, who buys the lush milch meadows, who will be the orphaned manor houses' owners, whose will the grape's wine be, the corn's seed, who encircles the land's udders? Jews, Jews, Jews. Go to the banks, where money reigns, to the editorial offices where the printed word reigns, to the businesses where work done by others piles up, to the centres, offices, trains, business enterprises, everywhere where life is certain and profit is easy. To whom does the money flow from this broken life? To Jews, to Jews, to Jews. And where is my race, my robbed, exploited race? Go to the Tyrol, Palestine, Flanders, everywhere, where one must die heroically, with a child's disposition. Who dies there in the front lines? Hungarians, Hungarians, Hungarians. Go to the offices, where one must die starving with honour, to the post offices, railways, schools, law courts, and a thousand other places where one must stand one's ground stupidly, honourably, with chattering teeth. Who lives in penury doing six times as much work, who freezes, who perishes starving, day in day out? Hungarians, Hungarians, Hungarians. Hungary is now the huge sow in a fairy tale, with a million hungry mouths, a million overflowing udders. The mouths tear at Hungarian bone, Hungarian flesh, Hungarian marrow, Hungarian hearts, drink Hungarian tears, Hungarian blood, Hungarian sweat; you grasp the udders, you suck them, you and the villain lordling robbers. Has my race not suffered in the past? Yes, yours has also suffered, but now, it is drunken payback time. What pay does my race receive? And is it not allowed to cry such things out loud? Gypsy, Serb, Slovak, Jew can cry out into history, but if we open our

⁴⁴ 'A zsidóságnak súlyosan megvásárolt jogai vannak ahhoz, hogy éljen a magyar életben. Mi voltunk a lendülő erő az új Magyarország felépülésében, hisz a ti fajotokban rejlő mély kincseknek is mi vagyunk a bányászai s kikáltói a világ piacán'. Ibid., p. 303. In *An Outlaw's Diary*, Tormay recounts her meeting with József Vészi, editor of (the German-language paper) *Pester Lloyd*, who apparently told her: 'I think it is natural that you should organise on a Christian and national basis, because Hungary was ruined by Jews – not by the Jews – but by Jews. Five hundred Jews ... I say so, even though I am a Jew myself'. Cécile Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, vol. 1, London, Philip Allan, 1923, p. 230.

mouths, it is barbarian chauvinism, prejudice, antisemitism. And you, you do not want to see, understand this?⁴⁵

One has the distinct impression that one of the reasons antisemites envied Jews was not so much for their supposed special powers and entrepreneurial skills, but for their long and tormented history, in comparison to which the Hungarians' past was brief, trifling and ultimately irrelevant. By positing the Jew as the universal Other and declared race enemy of the Hungarians, Szabó and others needed to magnify and glorify their own 'national tragedies' and victimhood, and thus put themselves on a par with this awe-inspiring, terrifying, 'race'. Miklós nevertheless takes the Jew's money and treats himself to a prostitute on the way home. An impassioned speech to potential sponsors headed by a 'conservative literary figure' in Budapest constitutes his final solo performance. He rejects existing 'radical' trends in favour of true Christianity: Catholic, anti-Protestant (Protestants are 'eunuchs'), anti-socialist, anti-cosmopolitan, but also 'democratic', by which is implied Hungarian Christian political, intellectual and spiritual hegemony. The ruling classes had lost the right to claim the moral and religious high ground, because they had allowed any old foreigner to stake his claim in the 'market of Hungarian souls'⁴⁶ and denied

⁴⁵ ' - És az én fajom!? Én nem félhetek a fajomért!? Az én fajom nem szenvedett eleget?! A háború folyamán elvetődtem Magyarország minden pontjára. Voltam a fronton, a front mögött, falun és városban. Láttam mindenféle embert, mindenféle viszonyokat. Voltam nyáron a fürdőkben, a Tatrában, a Balatonon, mindenütt, ahol egészséget isznak és örömet élnek. Kik voltak ott? Zsidók, zsidók, zsidók. Menj a színházakba, a mulatóhelyekre, mindenüvé, ahol élvezetet zabálnak. Kik élveznek? Zsidók, zsidók, zsidók. Menj a városokba, kiket emelt fel a sárból a háború, kiknek csordult tejes dézsával a háború emléke? Kik lettek az élet urai? Zsidók, zsidók, zsidók. Nézd meg, hova omlik a föld, kik veszik meg a fejtő birtokokat, kik lesznek gazdái az elbitangolt udvarházaknak, kiké lesz a szőlő bora, a kalász magva, kik állják körül a föld csecseit? Zsidók, zsidók, zsidók. Menj a bankokba, ahol uralkodik a pénz, a szerkesztőségekbe, ahol uralkodik a betű, az üzletekbe, ahol összetörlik a másoktól végzett munka, a központokba, kirendeltségekbe, a trénhez, a gazdasági vállalatokhoz, mindenüvé, ahol biztos az élet és könnyű a haszon. Kiknek folyik pénzt az egész megbomlott élet? Zsidóknak, zsidóknak, zsidóknak. És hol van az én fajom, az én megrabolt, kihasznált fajom? Menj Tirolba, Palesztinába, Flandriába, mindenüvé, ahol hősen, gyermekkedvvel kell meghalni. Kik halnak ott az első sorban? Magyarok, magyarok, magyarok. Menj a kis hivatalokba, ahol becsülettel kell éhen halni, postához, vasútra, iskolába, törvényszékre és ezer más helyre, ahol buta becsületesen, vacogó foggal kell megállni a végsőig a sarat. Kik nyomorognak hatszoros munkával, kik fáznak, kik döglének napról-napra éhen? Magyarok, magyarok, magyarok. Magyarország most egy mesebeli óriás koca, millió éhes szájjal, millió csorduló emlővel. A szájak magyar csontot, magyar húst, magyar velőt, magyar szívet rágnak, magyar könnyet, magyar vért, magyar verejtéket isznak, az emléket ti markoljátok, ti szívjátok és bitang grófi rablók. Hát az én fajom nem szenvedett a múltban? Igen, a tiétek is szenvedett, de most részeg kedvvel fizet a jelen. Mi a fizetése az én fajomnak? És ezt nem szabad kiüvölni? Oláh, szerb, tót, zsidó beleordíthatja a történelembe, ha mi megmukkanunk, az barbár sovinizmus, elfogultság, antiszemitizmus. És te, te sem akarod ezt látni és érteni?' Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, pp. 302-03.

⁴⁶ 'Miért hódíthatott bárki, idegen, bármi hanggal a magyar lelkek piacán?' Ibid., p. 367.

opportunities for real talent to flourish. Furthermore, the only historical class now is the Magyar *nép*, which stands on the brink of a gigantic *honfoglalás*.⁴⁷ Their outdated Christianity is nothing but ‘daily profit, the raised glass, dodgy handshakes, blinking condescension and impotence. My Christianity is fatally different’.⁴⁸ Although Miklós mentions emotive things such as will, deed, heroism, revolution and future Hungarian unity, his (and Szabó’s) programme, is primarily grounded in opposition to the status quo of the past and present, and a belief in the exceptional victimhood and suffering of the Hungarians. In other words, the balance is tipped in favour of negatives, not glorious deeds and golden ages, but 1,000 years of misery. The crux of this vision is pain, decay and, for Miklós, certain mental illness. When he declares that his Christianity is mortally different (*halálosan más*), his *halálosan* also means deathly, deadly.

There is perhaps a case to be made for the idea that Hungarian nationalist narratives, in comparison to neighbouring nationalisms,⁴⁹ are particularly pre-occupied with misery, decay and corruption leading to national death. An extreme example of this tendency is Tormay’s *An Outlaw’s Diary*. If one removes the topos of national death from the text, there is barely anything left. Szabó’s is slightly more refined in comparison: while he provides the superficial types János and Mária to embody future Hungarian racial supremacy and *Gemeinschaft*, his dystopian dreams and fascination with the evils of modern *Gesellschaft* in the form of ‘free competition’ (*szabadverseny*) are not only more compelling; ultimately, the gloom pervades everything. In setting up the opposition between Good and Bad, he does not and perhaps cannot allow for the likely occurrence of Good. Wherever

⁴⁷ ‘Most egy egészen más, gigászi honfoglalás révén egyetlenegy történelmi osztály: a magyar nép’. Ibid., p. 369.

⁴⁸ ‘Az önök kereszténysége a napi profit, a féltett csupor, sunyi kézfogás, hunyorgó kegyesség és impotencia. Az én kereszténységem halálosan más’. Ibid., p. 370.

⁴⁹ Polish nationalism under Partition (1772, 1793, 1795-1918) employed the notion of Poland as crucified ‘Christ among Nations’, but as a strongly Catholic country, embraced Catholicism as a positive feature in distinction to Orthodox Slav countries. See Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon, 1981. Serb nationalist mythology is also particularly focused on blood, gore and violence, and again uses religion to distinguish itself from its Catholic and Muslim neighbours, an overview of which is provided by Slobodan Blagojević, ‘Here I Am!’, trans. Hamdija Demirović in Joanna Labon (ed.), *Balkan Blues: Writings Out of Yugoslavia*, Evanston IL, Northwestern University Press, 1995, pp. 191-209. Czechs and Slovaks also nurture martyr complexes. See Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 1994.

Good might theoretically exist, and it is necessarily defined in relation to its Other (sickness, decay, foreign blood, and so on), Szabó cannot but subvert its likelihood by concentrating instead on the precariousness of its existence. I shall return to this primarily ‘negative’ construction of national identity later.

Miklós’s female counterpart is the beautiful Judit Farcády. Both are whores to Budapest society; both yearn to belong and to become whole, but unlike Miklós, Judit, probably because she is a woman, does not possess the mental faculties to save herself. She is flighty, easily impressed, intelligent and sensitive, but a compulsive liar, if not self-deceiver. One of her trips to the big city involves falling in love with a poor student before coming to despise him for his weakness, all the while writing tall stories home of her successful acting career. She goes to the acting school once, but is too intimidated by the self-confident theatrical types congregating at the front steps to go in. By far the unhappiest and most disturbing chapter of the novel is entitled ‘Judit’s Night’. Géza Sarkadi-Schönberger (the Hatvany caricature) and Judit (possibly based on the novelist Margit Kaffka, with whom Szabó fell in unrequited love in the 1910s) attend a feminists’ meeting at the Vigadó theatre. Szabó holds nothing back when describing the unspeakably ugly, barren and desperate women present,⁵⁰ as well as the repulsive Sziklai, a deformed coffee-house Jew and misogynist who extols the virtues of feminism in order to impress the ladies. Judit arrives on the arm of Félix Gutman, a war millionaire who refers to himself in the third person. All equally bored, they attend a wedding instead, a marriage between a pillar of old Hungary, whose Magyar fatalism Judit

⁵⁰ ‘Benn a hatalmas teremben már forrt, nyüzsgött, csuklott az egyberázott élet. A már sűrű teremben felgerjedt nők gesztikuláltak, vitakoztak, mely néha visítássá csapott fel. Sovány, rajongó nők világítóan fényes szürke szemmel, hegyes könyökkel, szegletes vonásokkal, elnyúlt, ovális arccal. Túl szélesre nyílt őszirózsák, nagy férfihívó szemekkel, vastag, csemecsegő ajakkal. A szerelem szétnyílt napraforgói, akik odafeküsznek az új ideák alá, hogy még ott is odaadhassák magukat. Keresztény nő kevesebb volt közöttük, de ezek arcán a legtöbb gyűlölet s mozdulataikban a legtöbb forradalom volt. Általában idősebbek voltak, igen csúfak s feltűnően sok volt közöttük a férfias arc. Mintha egy szörnyű akvárium lett volna az egész terem, melyben a tenger gigászi karikatúrája hemzseg, rettentő arcok rémültek fel a fortyogó emberkásából, melyektől eunuchká döbbsent a férfi. Melletlen, szűkmedencés, száradt nyakú testek, melyeket önmaga tagadására dobott elő az élet. Szomorú, sovány rögök, melyek nem tudnak megfogamzani az isteni napnak s csak hitvány elv-kukacok mozognak bennük. És túltengő, roppant lelógó mellű, földgömbfarú nők, nagy szerelmi vágykaszárnnyák, akikbe millió ölelkezést zsúfolt a lumpoló élet s most, hogy annyi nász után még mindig több ölelésük van, mint amennyi férfi: nagy gyűlöletet és hitet jöttek ölelkezni. Egy sovány, fényes szemű nő, rettentően himlőhelyes, a kormány eljárást bírálgatta s körötte nyerítő haragban viháncoltak össze’. Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, pp. 248-9.

admires, and a fertile peasant girl, whose rich child-bearing womb, strong suckling breasts and blood-rich limbs she pities.⁵¹ It is clear by this stage that Judit will never become a mother. She feels disgust for Gutman and all the other men she has allowed to have her in exchange for money (Sarkadi bought her virginity for 500 crowns), accommodation and the promise of social elevation. The chapter closes with a party at the Ritz, during which Judit suggests, with the noblest of intentions, that they should collect twenty starving people from the streets nearby and give them food. One member of the party turns this into something of a spectacle, forcing the wretched specimens to eat and drink more. When one dies from the shock of the rich food, police arrive to take Gutman away, and a politician present asks the journalist to ensure that names of the gentry do appear in the papers. This is Szabó's grotesque carnivalisation of the city populated by 'monkeys', their 'coffee house refinements', 'commercial friendships' (*reklámbarátság*) and utilitarian principles.

He pokes fun at the ignorant cosmopolitan types in an earlier chapter, in which Sarkadi invites his friends back to the village, promising them delicious food, good wine, great countryside and all the ethnographic curiosities they could wish for. Sadly, the Pest socialites see nothing from the window of the train, distracted as they are by the choice of brandies in the dining car. Upon arrival, they prefer to stay indoors talking about high art, that is, behaving as they had always done in the cafés of Pest. Even though they see, feel and understand nothing, they none the less feel somehow empty and irrelevant here, faced with the honesty of the village.⁵² The landscape did not register in their eyes, nature did not speak to them. The village did not remain in their hearts, and the *nép* remained alien to them.⁵³ Life, it is implied, cannot exist in the city, and neither can its corollary, health. The village is the source of bread and wine (harvesting scenes employ heavy imagery of Holy Communion), work, duty and family, and Mária's healthy

⁵¹ 'És mellette állott a lány, őstelevény szépsége az erős falunak, gazdag gyermekosztó medencével, erős szoptató mellel, vérbe ringó gazdag tagokkal, nagy, fekete szemeiben a meggúlt nap melegével'. Ibid., p. 252.

⁵² 'Mintha itt, a falu nagy őszintesége előtt, üresnek, értelmetlennek látták volna magukat'. Ibid., p. 130.

⁵³ 'A táj nem volt szemükben, a természet nem beszélt nekik. A falu nem maradt szívükben, a nép idegen maradt előttük'. Ibid., p. 130.

body which denies death itself. Judit rejects her family and village life, and ends up alone, working as a prostitute. The ‘tired flower of a sick race’, she also desires to conquer Budapest, like Miklós, but fails. And because she is to remain infertile, she is also the antithesis to Mária who, ‘with the promise of her wide womb was the Earth itself’.⁵⁴ The recipe for male redemption is similar. Miklós leaves the ‘dirt, hysterical pose and my despised genius [returning] to my virginity’, and should follow the example of János who, since his return to the village, is the embodiment of will, purpose and the future. ‘My programme is our village. I feel as if the whole village were my body and I shall massage the whole village into new life with my work, my health. You must break with that shameful Pest, be at home here, be healthy, work’.⁵⁵

Although Miklós fails to conquer the city, in contrast to János’s successful conquest of the village (and Mária’s fertile womb), Budapest nevertheless remains the touchstone of personal realisation. The male hero must first experience the sinful city in order to discover himself. The duty towards the collective, however, can only be performed in the village: national reproduction of healthy Hungarian stock must be undertaken as far away from the city as possible. This cult of the hero is centred on physical work: again, decay will occur naturally, even inevitably, and the ‘Magyar Man’ is required to engage in a conscious struggle against contagious degeneration, a task which can only be understood once he has tasted and rejected the tempting fruits of Pest. Szabó’s idea of nature and a ‘natural’ way of life is, of course, highly loaded. The conception of nature is that of an empty vessel ‘to be filled with whatever meaning is politically expedient [...] “Nature” acts as a register of changing conceptions of who qualifies for full membership of the *human* community’.⁵⁶ The classic nature/culture dichotomy in *Az elsodort falu* is not at all straightforward. Man requires a knowledge of culture in order to return to and serve nature, yet excessive amounts of culture also pollute, warp and result in individualism, a thoroughly sick, modern, and unnatural condition. János and

⁵⁴ ‘A hatalmas leány gyöngyörű fejével, gazdag mellével, combjai dermedt hullámaival, széles medencéje ígéretével a Föld volt ...’ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁵ ‘Azóta akarat, cél és erős jövő vagyok. Az én programon a falunk. Úgy érzem, hogy az egész falu az én testem s az egész falut fogom új életre masszírozni a munkámmal, az egészségemmel. Neked szakítanod kell azzal a gyalázatos Pesttel. Itthon lenni, egészséges lenni, dolgozni’. Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁶ Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1997, pp. 84-5.

Mária, the apparent heroes yet by far the least interesting characters in the novel, have no personalities to speak of: their individuality only exists in terms of their membership of the wider national, racial and spiritual collective. Mária is nature herself and thus without conflict, and János has already resolved his personal conflicts before the novel begins. Miklós is the extreme example of slavery to false culture, susceptible to mental illness and initially resistant to János's offer of salvation, he is the real *Übermensch* figure of the text, even going mad on one occasion, à la Nietzsche, upon seeing an unhappy horse.⁵⁷

Precursors and Populism

Az elsodort falu was not without precursors, whatever Szabó would have liked the reader to believe. János was probably based on the person of Dénes Szántó, the only son of an old Transylvanian family whom Szabó admired in his youth, and also bears more than a passing resemblance to the Nietzschean-anarchist hero of Mikhail Artsybashev's 1907 novel *Sanin*, which was translated into Hungarian in 1908 and avidly read in both Central Europe and Russia by a young audience eager for quasi-rebellious role models.⁵⁸ *Sanin* achieved immediate notoriety at home as a pornographic text which would lead Russia's youth astray. There is a number of parallels with Szabó's work, not least of which is its conservative grounding. Otto Boele writes in the introduction to the 2001 translation:

It may come as no surprise, then, that *Sanin* is actually a very traditional Russian novel. It is a classic *roman à these* with a superior, idealised hero and an omniscient, even meddlesome narrator. The message of the novel is expressed by its epigraph, taken from Ecclesiastes 7:29: "This alone have I found: that God, when he made man, made him straightforward, but men invent endless subtleties of their own." In *Sanin* these "subtleties" are indeed numerous: socialism, asceticism, Christianity, and Tolstoyism, but

⁵⁷ On the morning of January 3, 1889, in Turin, Nietzsche had a mental breakdown which left him an invalid for the rest of his life. Witnessing a horse being whipped by a coachman, he threw his arms around the horse's neck and collapsed, never to return to full sanity.

⁵⁸ Mikhail Artsybashev, *Sanin: A Novel*, trans. Michael R. Katz, Ithaca NY and London, Cornell University Press, 2001.

also vanity, pride, and chastity. The upright man, on the other hand, remains true to himself and “simply” embraces happiness. In the hero’s own words: “I know one thing – I live life and I don’t want it to be miserable. For that, first and foremost, it’s necessary to satisfy one’s natural desire. Desire is everything: if desire dies in a person, life dies; and if he kills desire, he kills himself.”⁵⁹

Like Sanin, János is a man of deeds rather than words, and his one-man eugenics programme to revitalise the village is his gesture towards the embrace of happiness. Szabó was also influenced by the conservative antisemitic novelist Lajos Tolnai (1837-1902), as well as Zsigmond Móricz, the Debrecen-based rather provincial Gábor Oláh (1881-1942), and the socialist Béla Révész (1876-1944).

Szabó added a few more ingredients to existing criticism of the ruling classes, feudal backwardness and the rampant individualism of the capital: condemnation of capitalism, liberalism, socialism, and also of his understanding of democracy as ‘free competition’, which must be replaced by, for all intents and purposes, a racial form of absolutism. Hungarians were defenceless against the combined might of German imperialism, Jewish trade and the tool of those Jews who have nothing: revolution. A profoundly anti-democratic race, the Hungarians will lose in any and all competition in the market of foreign values, and must be made lord in all spheres of life ‘not by physical blows or draconian legislation, but the inner thrust of instinct’.⁶⁰ The essence of goodness is, however, a non-existent, racially-pure Hungarian middle class and not, as most readings of *Az elsodort falu* would suggest, the peasantry. As I have already suggested, Mária and the land which is János’s birthright are merely tools with which the educated, Francophile gentleman realises his plans to become ‘universal man’:⁶¹ ‘[M]an should once again be simple, childlike and heroic; he must love life, but only service can give his life meaning; the individual, if he becomes self-centred will be ill; community is the only maintaining force. [...] [T]he only basis for the Hungarian future and

⁵⁹ Otto Boele, ‘Introduction’ to *Sanin*, pp. 1-12 (p. 5).

⁶⁰ See footnote 41.

⁶¹ In his second speech, Miklós hints at a contest between Jews and Hungarians for the title of *egyetemes ember* which rightfully belongs to the hard-working Hungarian, not the free-thinker or the wheeler-dealer capitalist. Szabó, *Az elsodort falu*, p. 236.

advancement is the Hungarian peasant'.⁶² This last sentence should not lead one to conclude that Szabó desired the foundation of a Hungarian state run by peasants. He never put forward a coherent, constructive political programme; his various diagnoses of the Hungarians' condition were all centred on an idealisation of the peasantry or, more precisely, the peasantry as the source of inspiration for young, optimistic intellectuals who read and heeded his words. Yet this does not involve a mass movement, or class-based mobilisation. There are no crowd scenes to speak of in *Az elsodort falu*, and the proletariat only make a fleeting appearance in the closing chapters set during the October 1918 revolution, witnessed by János returning from the front to Transylvania, his wife and as yet unborn child. Szabó urged his followers in 1923 in 'Towards a New Hungarian Ideology: The Hungarian Peasant', now that he had fallen out of love (and favour) with the Horthy regime:

Go out to the Hungarian villages. Disperse yourselves among the Hungarian peasants. Live the everyday life [of the village], speak the speech, observe every oscillation of its life. Fill your lungs with its soul ... Let the Hungarian peasant be the strength of your will, the unity of your struggles, the faith of your battle. Here the Hungarian peasant is the foundation of all building. And all who do not build on this foundation, builds a tomb for *magyarság*. Every battle has one aim: to deliver Hungary to the Hungarian peasant. [The peasant's] *honfoglalás* and victory is the eternal truth of our work.⁶³

This is also a formula of correct Magyar thinking and behaviour. The responsibility to deliver Hungary to the Hungarian peasant falls solely on the shoulders of his enthusiastic readers, and not on the shoulders of the peasants themselves. Whoever does not heed his words is complicit in the murder of Hungary. There was nothing

⁶² '[A]z ember legyen újra egyszerű, gyermeki és hős; szeretni kell az életet, de értelmet neki csak a szolgálat adhat; az egyén, ha öncélúvá válik, betegség, csak a közösség a megtartó erő. [...] [A] magyar jövő és a felemelkedés egyetlen alapja a magyar paraszt'. Gombos, *Szabó Dezső*, p. 185.

⁶³ 'Menjetek szét a magyar falvakba. Járjatok szét a magyar parasztok között. Éljétek mindennapját, beszéljétek beszédét, figyeljétek meg élete minden rezdülését. Szívjátok tele tüdőtöket a lelkével ... A magyar paraszt legyen akaratotok ereje, küzdelmeitek egysége, harcotok hite. Itt minden igaz építés alapja a magyar paraszt. És sírboltot épít a magyarságnak mindenki, aki nem erre az alapra épít ... Minden harcnak egy célja: visszafizetni Magyarországot a magyar parasztnak. Az ő honfoglalása, az ő győzelme a mi munkánk örökkévalósága'. Dezső Szabó, 'Új magyar ideológia felé. A magyar paraszt', *Élet és irodalom*, 1923, 5, cited in Borbándi, *A magyar népi mozgalom*, p. 203. Once again, the subject of transformation is the sickness of the city dweller, and the proposed cure lies without. To my mind, the aim is precisely not the deliverance of Hungary to the Hungarian peasant, but to the intellectual whose work is to internalise, then unceasingly reference an image of the peasant and peasant life.

remotely new in this philosophy. Ever since (and, indeed, before) the Russian *narodniki* movement of the 1890s, intellectuals in central and eastern Europe had flattered themselves with the belief that they alone could tap into the life-source of the nation, be it the peasantry or the proletariat. In 1910, Stanisław Brzozowski argued in *A Legend of Young Poland: Essays on the Structure of the Cultural Soul* that 'the Polish intelligentsia should subordinate itself to and serve the working class. It had no independent mission of its own'.⁶⁴ Szabó was proposing a 'collective act of Rousseauism'⁶⁵ which, on an individual and collective basis, served as something of a rite of passage into adulthood, and a process of purification to counteract the contamination of urban civilisation.⁶⁶ The Populists embraced this declaration of subordination to the peasantry in the 1930s, a claim which has remained relatively unquestioned ever since.⁶⁷

I now leave Szabó temporarily and turn to a work, almost peerless in the level of its rabid antisemitism (something of an achievement in the early 1920s), and in which the city, home to the two revolutions, is paradoxically presented largely as an innocent victim, a fragile and beautiful thing deflowered, a work by a woman whose ultra-nationalist gender politics were formed by her fear and loathing of Jews, revolution, most men, the great unwashed, and sexuality.

⁶⁴ Stanisław Brzozowski cited in Jeremy Jennings and Tony Kemp-Welch, 'The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie' in Jeremy Jennings and Tony Kemp-Welch (eds), *Intellectuals in Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 1-21 (p. 8). The authors also argued, convincingly, that the proletariat thus turned out to be 'a solution to the tragedy of the intelligentsia', enabling it to overcome its helplessness and alienation.

⁶⁵ Franco Venturi cited in Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism*, p. 89.

⁶⁶ Margaret Canovan cites the example of one orthodox Jew who moved to a Russian village as a *narodnik*, adopted peasant dress and customs, and claimed: "'I was baptised and felt myself literally renewed ... So I had drawn near the peasants, among whom I was to live.'" Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, London, Junction, 1981, p. 72.

⁶⁷ Much of the literature on east European populism also falls into the trap of believing populists' rhetoric, thus reinforcing the nonsensical idea that populism is the 'natural' ideology of the small producer. See, for example, David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism*, London, Weidenfeld, 1951; Borbándi, *A magyar népi mozgalom*.

Tormay in the Slippery Yellow Fog: An Outlaw's Diary

Cécile Tormay (1876-1937) had just turned forty-two when Mihály Károlyi's government took power on 31 October, 1918. Born in Budapest in 1876, her literary career began when she joined the staff of *Virágfakadás* (Flower Blossom) in 1904, and her first novel *Ember a kövek között* (People Among Stones) was published in 1911. *A régi ház* (The Old House), her depiction of mid-nineteenth-century Budapest life won the coveted Hungarian Academy of Sciences Péczele prize in 1914. She established MANSz, the conservative Hungarian Women's National Association (Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége) in 1920, and the periodical *Napkelet* (East) in 1922, intended to counter the influence of *Nyugat* (West). It consciously followed the *keresztény kurzus* (Christian course) by which it understood neither employing nor reviewing Jewish writers. 'It wanted to be the urban organ of the genteel middle class, according to its original intention to counteract *Nyugat*'.⁶⁸ Alongside her friend Emma Ritoók, Tormay was one of the notable right-wing female writers of the early twentieth century whose sensibilities were informed by the belief in a special role for women in forming national consciousness, and a robust opposition to socialist feminism. *Bujdosó könyv* (An Outlaw's Diary) was first published in 1921-22, reprinted five times before the Second World War and banned in 1945, before being published again by right-wing émigré publishers in Canada in the 1970s, and again in Hungary in 1998. It is in the form of a diary but was in fact written in retrospect and presented as an objective literary enterprise, even though the author's confusion of names and dates, and obvious reliance on hearsay, rather quickly lead the reader to doubt its authenticity as a personal chronicle. It is her account of events from 31 October 1918 to 21 March 1919 (Volume I, *Revolution*) and from 21 March to 8 August 1919 (Volume II, *The Commune*), published in English in 1923 with a foreword by Alan Ian Percy, the eighth Duke of Northumberland. Northumberland, founder of the Anti-Socialist Union, publisher of *The Patriot* and one of the early supporters

⁶⁸ 'Az úri középosztály urbánus szellemű organuma akart lenni, eredeti szándéka szerint a *Nyugat* ellensúlyozója'. Schöpflin, *A magyar irodalom a XX. században*, p. 267.

of the British Union of Fascists who used their links with Mosley to campaign for the protection of their land and titles, writes that the work is a

vivid and dramatic document [...] and yet its style is so simple and completely devoid of all “frills” or straining after effect, that it will appeal as much to those who like good literature and a moving tale for their own sakes, as to those who desire to understand a chapter of history about which little is known, but which throws a flood of light upon the great world movements of to-day.⁶⁹

The following is a typical example of Tormay’s simple, frill-free prose, her diary entry for 9th April 1919 in the early days of the Commune under Béla Kun:

Bestial tyranny spreads like a deluge over the earth, and the bloodless victims of war are dragged helplessly into the vortex. It has already swept away towns, countries, even continents in its uncurbed stream. It has surged up from under the earth through the gratings of gutters, through the doors of dark dwellings, down the marble staircases of banks, over the columns of the newspapers. The groping, mystical Slav, the high-spirited yet conservative Hungarian, the meditative clumsy Teuton, what a contrast of races! Yet the realisation of the Soviet system has been accompanied in every case by wonderfully similar symptoms. The awful conception shows no trace whatever of the racial characteristics of the three peoples, yet it has been carried through on the same plan and by people of the same psychology in Moscow, Budapest and München [*sic*]. [...] What demoniacal power, hidden by the fog, prompted these cries [of ‘Long Live the Revolution!’]? What power cast its spell to lure a haughty, brave nation into shame, cowardice and perdition?⁷⁰

This lengthy quotation, which is remarkable neither in style nor in content for Tormay, constitutes a digest of her (and Northumberland’s) overriding preoccupations: the ‘cancer’ of the Jewish conspiracy spreading throughout Europe and threatening all that is good and Christian;⁷¹ the brave and noble Hungarians’

⁶⁹ Duke of Northumberland, ‘Foreword’ in Cécile Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary, Vol. I. Revolution*, pp. ix-xii (p. ix). For histories of British Fascism, see Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow (eds), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain*, London, Croom Helm, 1980; and John Stevenson, ‘Conservatism and the failure of fascism in interwar Britain’ in Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 264-82.

⁷⁰ Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary*, Vol. II, p. 58.

⁷¹ In the foreword, Northumberland refers to this cancer as ‘a pseudo-scientific organisation of the Freemasons, the International Freethinkers’ Branch of Hungarian Higher Schools [...] the “Red” International of Moscow, the “Yellow” International of Amsterdam, the various shades of Socialism and Syndicalism [...], one great subversive Movement though their adherents are not all aware of it, and the strings are pulled by Secret Societies which during the past century have been behind every revolution in Europe’. Northumberland, ‘Foreword’, Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary*, vol. 1, pp. x-xii.

racial isolation but also duty to restore order in chaotic Central Europe; and motifs of helplessness, victimhood, humiliation. Tormay was a belligerent representative of that self-styled 'Christian gentle middle class' whose aversion to commerce was based on 'auto-stereotyping', pushing them towards the radical Right and Fascism in order to 'take the despised – but also deeply desired – positions in the economy out of the hands of the mainly Jewish bourgeoisie'.⁷² Her relentless hysterical tone and overblown language make for a demanding read, but the diary is also a revealing insight into the mind of a woman whose insistence on female fragility did not prevent her from traipsing the streets of a Communist city alone day and night, and whose personality fits the model of Michael Marrus's 'inner circle' antisemite. Marrus categorises antisemitism and antisemitic personalities in three not entirely separate concentric circles: (i) the outer circle, in which mild and unreflective antisemitic tendencies are not strongly linked to emotional needs and are open to education ; (ii) the middle circle, in which exist more single-minded and dedicated antisemites who may be mobilised in times of crisis, vote for or join antisemitic organisations but do not support radical solutions; and (iii) the fanatical antisemite, the monomaniac who does not include Jews under the heading of humanity, is not inclined towards compromise, and 'characterised by hatreds that dominate and seriously corrupt their personalities'.⁷³ Tormay's obsession with Jews follows the standard early twentieth-century formula for radical antisemitism, namely that Jews as a whole were an evil force which should be combated, if not annihilated, but upon closer inspection, reveals some more complex emotions and, I shall argue, sheds some light on the nature of antisemitism itself.

Tormay was able to grasp the fact that the revolution of October 1918 was carried out under the auspices of a democratic national council, and the Commune under Béla Kun was an attempt to impose a Soviet system of government on Hungary, yet the two regimes became one and the same in her mind. Indeed,

⁷² Pál Pach, 'Business Mentality and the Hungarian National Character', p. 95. The notion that the entire Hungarian race, lord and peasant included, was fundamentally *unwirtschaftlich* was also propounded by the historian Gyula Szekfű and Tibor Eckhardt, MP for the Keresztény Kisgazdapárt (Christian Smallholders) in 1922, one of the founders of Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete in 1923, and vice president of the Magyar Revíziós Liga from 1928.

⁷³ Michael Marrus, 'The Theory and Practice of Anti-Semitism', *Commentary*, 74, 1982, 2, pp. 38-42 cited in Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 26.

Károlyi's government appears to be even more upsetting for her than that of Kun, the latter only reinforcing the reality of the Jews' murderous intentions. The murder of the former prime minister István Tisza on 31 October 1918 marked the death-knell for Hungary in Tormay's mind: 'Poor Tisza! In his good qualities and in his shortcomings he was typical of his race. He was faithful and God-fearing, honest, credulous and obstinate, proud, brave, calumniated and lonely, just like old Hungary'.⁷⁴ The distinction between Good and Bad Hungarians is central. Listing the members of Károlyi's government, and never omitting assimilated Jews' original surnames (Lajos Hatvany-Deutsch, Ernő Garami-Grünfeld and so on), she concludes: 'Eleven Jews and eight bad Hungarians!'⁷⁵ Bad Hungarians also include feminists, police who went over to the side of the 'wreckers', the 'rabble', misled poets, deicidal Communists and so on. In other words, anyone in the pay of those 'criminal fanatics, [...] mental and moral perverts'.⁷⁶ Strict boundaries necessarily exist in this worldview between Right and Wrong, and Good and Bad, boundaries policed by her personally. Tormay's investigations lead her to be endlessly appalled and disgusted, rendered speechless and incapable of action by the Jews' invasion. Yet Jews are portrayed primarily in terms of their slipperiness; they are intangible evil, something one cannot quite put one's finger on because they transcend simple Right and Wrong. On 25 November 1918, she finds herself on Király utca, at the centre of the Jewish district: 'I walked fast, almost running through the crowd, as if I were escaping the meshes of a conspiracy which floated in the air but which one could not grasp, because as soon as one touched it it fell to pieces like slime'.⁷⁷ The dark, underhand forces which had occupied the city and, by extension, the country, bring with them a cloying stasis, resulting in brain death to the living (Good, Christian Hungarians), enforced rootlessness, powerlessness, and national death. Victimhood is associated with goodness, suffering and

⁷⁴ Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, vol. I, p. 20. Later on: 'So he died as he had lived. His sublime fate had been accomplished. Life and death had produced a greater scene than the genius of the Greek writers of tragedies could accomplish. The fate of a whole nation is reflected in the bitter bloody fate of one of her sons. Tisza fell like an oak - and in his fall tore up the soil in which his life was rooted. While he stood, nobody knew how tall he was. Like a tree in the wilderness, it was possible only to measure him when he had fallen. Stephen Tisza died in the same hour as Hungary. Those who murdered him will die in the hour of Hungary's resurrection'. Ibid., p. 96.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Northumberland in Ibid., p. x.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

martyrdom. Jews, on the other hand, are simply dead: their eyes and language are dead, their bodies are sick, they are outside history, and their stranglehold on life chokes all in its grip. Her descriptions of Jews are remarkable not only for their ferocity, but also because the blond Jew, the non-Jewish-looking Jew, cannot and does not exist. I give only a few examples. The first is a description of Mihály Károlyi: 'The deformed offspring of a consanguineous marriage, the heir to the enormous entailed possessions of the Károlyis, was born with a cleft palate and a hare-lip. He was fourteen years old when an operation was performed on him which enabled him, against the will of Divine Providence, to learn to speak – so that he might beguile his nation and his country into destruction'.⁷⁸ Jewish men have noses which fall like soft bags over their flabby, feminine lips, protruding, fleshy ears, 'negro' features, small eyes with red eyelids and white eyelashes; they are 'bandy-legged little monsters', and their *mauscheln* is rapid, garbled, impossible for the human ear to understand, their lips moving 'as if they had gulped down some burning hot mouthful of something'.⁷⁹ She recalls seeing Béla Kun in person:

Shortly after the October revolution a man was addressing some disabled soldiers from the top of a garbage box near the railway station. I had been astonished at the time to see how this ghetto-Jew, who spoke bad Hungarian and had only lately discarded the gabardine, managed to get a hearing. I remember that clearly. He had a common fat face and his eyes blinked while he preached against the existing order. His blubbering mouth opened and closed as if he were chewing the cud. He shouted in a hoarse, lifeless voice. He grew warm, and as he spoke he removed his hat frequently and wiped the perspiration off his baldish head with the palm of his dirty hand. I had wondered at the ugly foreign people who were listened to now-a-days by our folk. People who can't speak Hungarian set one Hungarian against another.⁸⁰

Jewish women are either extraordinarily beautiful, sirens who warp Christian men's minds, or dirty orthodox creatures, unkempt and in scruffy wigs, given to eating garlic sausages in the boxes at the Opera and leaving the greasy paper bags lying about. None of this was new; however, her vivid physical descriptions and the series of mug-shot-style photographs of leaders of the revolutions, reminiscent

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 166.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 214.

of Lombroso's illustrations of degenerates,⁸¹ contrast sharply with her verbal descriptions of Jews as everything and nothing:

The Jew comes uninvited and declines to go when dismissed. He spreads and yet holds together. He penetrates the bodies of the nations. He invisibly organises his own nation among alien peoples. He creates laws beyond the law. The Jew denies the conception of 'patrie' but has a 'patrie' of his own which wanders and settles with him. He scoffs at other people's conception of God and yet builds churches of his own everywhere. He laments the fallen walls of Jerusalem and drags the ruins invisibly with him. He complains of his isolation but builds secret ways as arteries of the boundless city which has by now spread practically throughout the world. His connections and communications reach everywhere.⁸²

The Jew moves in mysterious, not-quite-human ways; he recedes and disintegrates when touched; he seeps noiselessly through locked doors, ready to pounce. One might reasonably assume, then, that Jews who do not 'look Jewish' would be the ultimate threat, perfectly assimilated and thus terrifyingly concealed, but Tormay's Jews are freaks whose exterior form will always belie essential difference.

Jews had used their extraordinary powers to cast a spell over the Hungarians, put them to sleep, intoxicate them. 'Is the maniacal magician who with his evil eye has cast a spell of suicidal lethargy over the whole nation going to close his hand definitely over his benumbed prey?'⁸³ Tormay frowned on excessive drinking, and suggests, as Szabó does in *Az elsodort falu*, that Jews control the supply and consumption of alcohol, another way in which they intoxicate, debilitate and therefore control the Hungarian race. The revolutions represent the total collapse of moral and material order; nothing is in its correct place any longer, hence the motif of dirt. The correct ordering of space had been turned on its head, with the appearance of revolutionary posters all over town like a 'skin disease' and the liberal *Népszava* paper penetrating the city from the slums; children answer back to their parents; Jews are in Parliament and the Christian middle class are in hiding:

⁸¹ See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁸² Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. II, p. 59.

⁸³ Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. I, p. 289.

The beautiful marble staircase of the house of Parliament was indescribably dirty. Its walls were besmeared with coloured pencil scrawls, and red inscriptions defiled the columns, such as “Long live the republic!” “Long live Social Democracy!” All their offices are like that. Public buildings sink with incredible rapidity into this dirty state. I have not been there myself but was told by people who have that the royal castle, the so called national palace, is as unswept and filthy as a railway station in the Balkans. In the small drawing-room of Maria Theresa cigarette ends and sausage skins litter the floor. The beautiful old stoves are nearly burst with the coal that is crammed into them, the walls around them are stained with smoke, the valuable old tables are covered with ink blotches, and at them our new administrators sit in their shirt sleeves.⁸⁴

When one of her friends is arrested and questioned during the Commune, she remarks that the office of the political police was ‘all dirt, confusion, and Jews’.⁸⁵ Dirt is matter out of place, it is ‘essentially disorder [...] In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea’.⁸⁶ That begs the question of what constitutes Tormay’s idea of normality and order. Her preoccupation with Hungary’s crucifixion by the Jews leaves little room for anything positive. Good Hungarians are very much like herself, Christian, God-fearing and genteel. Her national identity is also consciously female: ‘We women are already great in numbers. Every day we form new camps in different quarters of the town. I address the women, and tell them that our fortress is a triangle, the three advanced outworks being our country, our faith, and our family’.⁸⁷ Women have a special role in protecting Hungarian dignity, for if the war is lost and the Jewish Communists win, women ‘are to be common property when [...] the home is broken up, and God and country have been denied’.⁸⁸ Men, it is implied, had neglected their national duty: the feeble flames of national faith ‘had been carried quietly back into the homes by women. And perhaps the time has come at last when the men will want to prove their bravery to those who expect them to be

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 251.

⁸⁵ Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary*, Vol. II, p. 66.

⁸⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary*, Vol. I, p. 197.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

brave'.⁸⁹ The yellow, clinging fog⁹⁰ had almost completely submerged Budapest, however, a few sacred spaces did remain untouched: the Castle, royal barracks and palaces, churches, the National Club, the house she shared with her mother, and the hearts of patriotic women.

Who, then, is to blame for Hungary's descent into hell? The blame is laid at the feet of the weak, hypnotised masses. Here, Budapest plays a surprising central role:

I remember the first red flag hoisted. It hung alone for a long time, then it was followed by others. The rebellion of October ordered the beflagging of the town. The perpetrators of that crime commanded an obscene display of joy in the hour of our greatest disaster, and Budapest donned in cowardly fashion the festive decoration imposed upon her, while the country was being torn to pieces all around. In the days that followed she did not dare to remove it: she stood there, beflagged, during the downfall, under the heel of foreign occupation, like a painted prostitute, and the national colours became antagonistic to our souls, an insult to, a mockery of, our grief. [...] And this accusation is not raised against the foreign race which has achieved power, which has attained its ends by sheer perseverance, ingenuity, industry and pluck – but against Magyardom and the whole nation, who have, heedlessly, incapably and blindly, given up their own heart – the capital.⁹¹

This is not the 'Judapest' so despised by most antisemites, but the home to St. Stephen's Crown, Parliament, the royal palaces, and the site of the struggle for Hungary's future. Tormay eventually left Budapest following the issue of a warrant for her arrest on the third day of the Commune. 'The town must be given the chance to regain its breath, to recover consciousness. When it wakes its whole body will be covered with the red eruption. It will be everywhere. It will cover the royal barracks, the palaces, the very churches'.⁹² Under the name of Erzsébet Földváry she travels to stay with the Kállay family on their estate, where she finds peace, tranquillity and order.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

⁹⁰ Szabó's baddies are also described as yellow, with yellow skin and/or teeth.

⁹¹ Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. I, p. 275. She continues: 'All past powers and governments are responsible for this. The reproach concerns to the same extent those politicians who are still debating about shades and won't see that to-day there are only colours [red, white and green], and won't feel that in a short time there will be no more colours, but only one colour, and that that one will be – red'. Ibid., pp. 275-76.

⁹² Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. II, p. 12.

[I]n their very dreams the villagers cling to the soil; and the soil is their country, and their country is Great Hungary. My heart went out to the villages. The village, the Hungarian village, is selfish like a child, indifferent like a sign-post, and as strong as wind and weather. Its sins are the wild revels derived from its vineyards; the desire for fecundity in men, women and soil alike. Its blessings are sowing and reaping. There is here a ray of hope. Will the Hungarian village be our salvation?⁹³

The village is timeless, far removed from the millennial struggle between Jews and Hungarians. It is Catholic and pure, and the men are separated from the women.

Tormay fled to Balassagyarmat, a town north of Budapest and a counter-revolutionary stronghold, but even here she does not feel safe, what with all the 'invisible hands' groping her. The Jews now penetrate the innocent countryside, again polluting and corrupting time and space. She describes Tibor Szamuely in some depth, referring to his bohemian tendencies and love for English clothes, his sensuality and cruelty, superficial education, hyena-like features and hunched back, and penchant for humiliating Christian women. 'Gallows are erected everywhere he goes. And the gallows, like black Hebrew characters, remain in the landscape when his special train has passed on to some other rebellious district'.⁹⁴ Again, her claim that the Jews' mask had been thrown off sits rather uncomfortably with her insistence on their obvious physical deformities.

Ultimately, there comes 'one on a white horse, dressed in white linen. And the white one vanquishes the red'.⁹⁵ Tormay returns to Budapest on 7 August 1919, and sees the Castle and the house of Parliament still standing, tragic, aged and pockmarked with bullet holes, but defiant. Towns and villages, and the capital, breathe freely again, 'the grape harvest has come in the land of hunchbacks'.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

Kosztolányi's *Édes Anna* (1926): the restoration of order ends in disaster

Dezső Kosztolányi's (1885-1936) fifth and last novel *Édes Anna*⁹⁷, his only novel set in Budapest, represents the least veiled of his criticisms of the social order. It was written and published seven years after the fall of the Commune, which had lasted 133 days and collapsed as abruptly as it had come into existence. Writing in 1934, Antal Szerb recalled that: 'From one day to the next in the summer of 1919, revolutionary and proletarian Hungary became national and Christian Hungary [...] Those compromised in the revolutions vanished, and new people took their places. But there were also many who were humming the Internationale only yesterday, and now with tears in their eyes, sang the National Anthem and "Erger Berger" in alternation'.⁹⁸ Among those who, for reasons of expediency, changed their tune from one day to the next, would have been Mr and Mrs Kornél Vizy, owners of the house at 238 Attila utca, in the Krisztinaváros district of Buda, and in which the novel is set. Anna is the maid employed by the Vizys after the fall of the Commune in a bid to restore domestic and psychological order, something of a return to those happy days of peace (*boldog békeidők*), when all good people had domestics. Humiliated by the short-lived dictatorship of the proletariat, the Vizys and their ilk seek solace in what they perceive to be a natural hierarchy: the master/servant relationship. The paradox is that Anna, the perfect maid, can and does kill her employers.

Most analyses of the novel have focussed on the psychology of Anna, the 'wonder maid', and attempt to provide answers to the question why she kills.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Dezső Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, Budapest, Révai, 1937. *Édes Anna* is the maid's name, and *édes* also means 'sweet'. The title might therefore be translated as *Anna Édes* or *Sweet Anna*.

⁹⁸ '1919 nyarán a forradalmi és proletarizált Magyarország egyik napról a másikra átalakult nemzeti és keresztény Magyarországgá. Az importált forradalomnak nyoma sem maradt. A forradalmakban kompromittált emberek eltűntek, és újak jöttek a helyükbe. De sokan voltak olyanok is, akik még előző nap az internacionálét dúdolták, és most könnyek között fújták felváltva a Himnusz és az Erger-bergert'. Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, p. 492. The 'Erger Berger' was a popular antisemitic song of the period: 'Erger, berger, Schlossberger/ minden zsidó gazember/ Akár bankár, akár más/ kenyere a család'. See Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Tim Wilkinson, Budapest, Corvina, 1999, p. 111.

⁹⁹ This was the title of the first English translation: Dezső Kosztolányi, *Wonder Maid: A Novel*, trans. Adam de Hegedus, New York, Staples, 1947. See, for instance: János Kodolányi,

Kosztolányi had studied Freud and applauded the efforts of his friend Sándor Ferenczi to popularise Freudian psychology in Hungary.¹⁰⁰ It was not Kosztolányi's intention in *Édes Anna*, however, to provide a psychological profile or a moralising tale of a brutalised girl, made into a machine by her employers, and who turns on them in an act of individual or class revenge. The reader is never sure why Anna picks up a knife and kills the Vizys in their bed in an apparently unpremeditated act she also fails to understand. Kosztolányi wrote: 'The experience that forms the basis of this work is opaque to me too. Obviously, I have also read many of these little articles in the newspapers which tell of a good maid who, "for no reason", beat her kind employers to death'.¹⁰¹ It was precisely the inexplicability of why a perfect maid should murder her employers that captured his imagination. I am not so concerned with the psychological or ethical questions raised in the novel, but with how, within and without the four walls of 238 Attila utca, attempts are made to reinforce order. Like Tormay, Kosztolányi portrays a Budapest that is the heart of the country, host to both red and white revolutions. Kosztolányi, however, at this stage of his literary career was averse to idealism,¹⁰² and this novel denies the imposition of any form of exegesis on the city.

The novel opens and closes with instances of gossip. The first chapter recounts the flight of Béla Kun from the country, as told by the residents of the middle-class Krisztinaváros district to each other. They believe they saw Kun

'Kosztolányi Dezső: *Édes Anna*' in *Pandóra*, 1927, 1, pp. 47-50; Ágnes Heller, *Az erkölcsi normák felbomlása. Etikai kérdések Kosztolányi Dezső munkásságában*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1957; László Németh, 'Kosztolányi Dezső' in László Németh, *Két nemzedék. Tanulmányok*, Budapest, Magvető, 1970, pp. 118-21; and Attila Tamás, 'A lélektani motiválás tényezői Kosztolányi Édes Annájában' in Attila Tamás, *Értéktérmentők nyomában. Művek, irányzatok, elméleti kérdések*, Debrecen, Csokonai, 1994, pp. 100-07.

¹⁰⁰ Ferenczi was the first to discuss Freud in Hungary. See Sándor Ferenczi, 'Schopenhauernak Goethehez írt egy levele, pszichoanalitice nézve', *Nyugat*, 5, 1912, 13, pp. 43-50 (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/human/szepirod/magyar/nyugat/html/doc/04008.htm>). Kosztolányi had also recently translated Karel Čapek's play *R. U. R.* in 1924, though his translation was not published in the life time of either writer.

¹⁰¹ 'Az élmény, mely ennek a munkámnak alapja, szintén tisztázatlan előttem. Nyilván én is sokszor olvastam az újságokban kis napihírt, mely arról szól, hogy egy jó cseléd "minden ok nélkül" agyonverte jó gazdáit'. Dezső Kosztolányi cited in Dezsőné Kosztolányi, *Kosztolányi Dezső*, Budapest, Holnap, 1990, p. 520.

¹⁰² He flirted briefly with far right in the early 1920s before falling out with the counter-revolutionary *Magyar Írók Nemzeti Szövetsége* (National Association of Hungarian Writers), and Dezső Szabó. The figure of Nero Kosztolányi's novel *Nero, a véres költő* (Nero, the Bloody Poet, 1922) may have been a parody of Szabó.

fleeing the country in an aeroplane of which he was the pilot and sole passenger. Crossing the Danube and flying low over the Vérmező¹⁰³, his unshaven face grinning at people beneath him, his pockets overflow with stolen cakes, church treasures and jewellery. 'At least this is what was being said in Krisztinaváros'.¹⁰⁴ The narration then moves straight into the realm of precise facts. At six in the evening of July 31 1919, Kornél Vizy calls for his maid to tell her that the Reds have lost. Roles within the block of flats seem to be restored immediately. Vizy no longer addresses the janitor, Ficsor, as Comrade, and Ficsor recommences speaking to his employer as 'My Lord' in the very same instant of 'world-historical politeness'.

Most of the novel takes place in the closed, intimate environment of a middle-class household, in which external reality is filtered through the lives and attitudes of the Vizys. Their presence in the flat is supposed to guarantee moral absolutes. On the only occasion the Vizys leave their flat, Anna is seduced by their nephew, the nihilist dandy János Patikárius.¹⁰⁵ Otherwise, this is the space within which the experiment to restore their sense of order is begun. The Vizys are not, however, rational beings. Awed by authority, both their sense of their own moral authority, and sources of political power, they are prone to attending séances for their dead daughter, believing every word they read in the pro-Horthy press, and confusing the ministry (Vizy's employer) with mystery. Mrs Vizy longs for a good, clean girl from the countryside, able to refrain from stealing and carousing with Romanian soldiers. She considers herself a realist: servants cheat and people are bad. 'These two bitter years had taught her that life was worth nothing, and possessions were everything'.¹⁰⁶ While she works herself into a frenzy over the memories of past cheating employees, her husband is reinstated under Horthy to fulfil his role as 'an outstanding bureaucrat, diligent and scrupulous. This was something acknowledged by his superiors and inferiors alike. Nor did he lack a

¹⁰³ Literally 'Field of Blood', this was the site of the Jacobin rebels' execution in 1795.

¹⁰⁴ 'Legalább a Krisztinában ezt veszélték'. Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ 'Patikus' is a folksy word for pharmacist. Patikárius procures the illegal materials for Anna's chemical abortion in chapter fourteen.

¹⁰⁶ 'E keserves két esztendőben fokozatosan megtanulta, hogy az élet semmi és az anyag minden'. Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, p. 79.

social conscience. Should people going about their business turn to him, he would immediately pen a memo to the relevant organisation'.¹⁰⁷ Mrs Vízzy's *cselédmania* (servant hysteria) is only placated by the arrival of Anna, in the sixth chapter. The girl's mere presence restores the peace of the past: even the silver spoons clink in the old, idyllic manner as she lays the table.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, the whole of Krisztinaváros is talking about her: the legend of Béla Kun has been replaced by the legend of the wonder maid. 'One thing was clear: she could not be mentioned in the same breath as all the other [domestic servants], she was such a precious substance, worth taking great pains over, one only had to bring her up, and polish her to perfection'.¹⁰⁹

A job is arranged for János in the vaults of a bank managed by a cigar-smoking, thick-set Jew, where 'withdrawing to the holiest of holies, presented himself at the altar where [János] could, for minutes at a time, contemplate face-to-face the sole idol in which the twentieth century still believed, the God of Money'.¹¹⁰ Anna becomes pregnant, and János arranges her abortion. Her heart is broken. Soon after, she receives a proposal of marriage from Báthory, the recently-widowed chimneysweep seeking love and a mother for his family. 'Something attracted the chimneysweep, perhaps the girl's suffering, her fresh pain, that men sniff out right away, the humility and exploitation, which they often like more than beauty itself'.¹¹¹ She is bullied into refusing by Mrs Vízzy who, in true bourgeois Budapest theatrical fashion, renders herself bedridden and tells Anna that 'such people' only want a servant, not a wife, and that she would have to flee his beatings and end up working for Jews. Meanwhile, János returns from dealing coal in Vienna, to find that the poor relation Budapest seemed intimate by comparison.

¹⁰⁷ 'Vízzy kitűnő hivatalnok volt, szorgalmas, lelkiismeretes is. Ezt a főlebbvalói és alárendeltjei egyaránt elismerték. Még a szociális érzés se hiányzott belőle. Ha ügyes-bajos emberek fordultak hozzá, tüstént írta az utalványt valamely szervhez'. Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁰⁸ 'Régi, idilli ezüstajjal csilingeltek a kanalak'. Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁰⁹ 'De az is bizonyos, hogy ezt a többiekkel egy napon se lehet említeni, oly értékes matéria, mellyel érdemes vesződni, csak ki kell nevelni, csak ki kell csiszolni egészen'. Ibid., p. 82.

¹¹⁰ '[...] míg ő elvonulva a szentek szentjébe, személyesen járult az oltárhoz s egy percben talán színről-színre szemlélhette azt, amiben a huszadik század még hitt, az egyedülvaló bálványt, az arany Istent'. Ibid., pp. 125-6.

¹¹¹ 'A kéményseprőt vonzotta valami, lehet, hogy a lány szenvedése, a friss fájdalma, melyet a férfiak mingyárt megszimatoznak, az alázat és kiszolgáltatottság, mely sokszor jobban tetszik nekik, mint maga a szépség'. Ibid., p. 177.

After throwing a wild party on February 17 1920,¹¹² he wanders into the Józsefváros district and finds a prostitute: ‘Her hands, which had once pickled gherkins, hung at her sides. The woman was, astoundingly, wearing an apron and a gaudy peasant’s headscarf over her hair. This sort of folksy garb was intended to inflame the unfulfilled dreams of a tranquil home, with its happiness and nice neat little housewife, in the long-deprived imaginations of workers from the villages hurrying to the factories at dawn and apprentices out for some fun on a Saturday night.’¹¹³ In the Vizy household and the entire novel, János is the opposite of order.¹¹⁴ It is not clear, however, that it was his behaviour that drove Anna to take revenge.

The Vizys throw a dinner party, where Anna spies János flirting with Mrs Vizy. When the guests have left and the hosts are in bed, Anna kills them both with a kitchen knife. Her arrival, incredible work ethic and eventual murder of the Vizys provide reflection for the local armchair commentators on the balance of political power in the world beyond 238 Attila utca. Although Anna has no idea why she killed her employers, others in the apartment block are sure. According to Druma, the prosecutor at the trial: ‘They have poisoned the soul of the healthy Hungarian people. Those villains, those bandits. It would have been unimaginable before. Such a terrible deed. But this is the result of all that Communist propaganda and those agitator training schools. This is the final fling of Bolshevism’.¹¹⁵ Once again, order has been turned on its head.

¹¹² Guests at the party were invited to his ‘wake’. The date of his death had been advertised as February 16, 1920. Outside the novel, on February 17, Béla Somogyi, the editor of the Social Democrat *Népszava* and Béla Bacsó, a journalist at the same paper, were murdered by members of the Osternburg special detachment, and their bodies were thrown in the Danube.

¹¹³ ‘Kezei, melyek valaha uborkát savanyították, lógtak. Csakhogy ez a nő – egészen meglepően – kötényt viselt és tarka parasztkendőt a haján. Azok közül való volt, akik itt ezzel a népies viselettel a nyugalmas otthonról, a boldogságról meg a jó kis takaros gazdasszonykáról való be nem teljesült álmokat akarják fölgyujtani hajnalban, a gyárba iparkodó, faluról származó munkásoknak és szombaton este a mulatozó mesterlegényeknek kibőjtölt képzeletében’. Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, p. 204.

¹¹⁴ János bears a striking resemblance to Kosztolányi’s greatest comic creation, Kornél Esti. See Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer and Stephen Brunauer, *Dezső Kosztolányi*, Munich, Finnisch-Ugrisches Seminar an der Universität München, 1983, p. 173, and Dezső Kosztolányi, *Esti Kornél* [1933-36], Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1981.

¹¹⁵ ‘Mégmérgezték az egészséges magyar nép lelkét. Azok a bitangok, azok a zsványok. Azelőtt ez elképzelhetetlen lett volna. Egy ilyen iszonyúság. De a sok kommunista propagandának, az agitátor-iskoláknak itt az eredménye. Ez a bolsevizmus utolsó kilengése’. Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, p. 228.

The novel ends in 1922. 'Normality' has been restored. In the last chapter, following Anna's sentencing and the signing of the Trianon treaty, the narrator asks, 'What has happened since? Every Sunday, a military band reverberates around the ramparts of the Castle, and passers-by unconsciously fall into step with its brassy din'.¹¹⁶ The narrator overhears a conversation taking place at the end of his garden between Druma and two friends. Druma informs his friends that Kosztolányi will work for whoever is in power: first he was in the Jews' pockets, now he works for the Christians. 'It was clear, though, that they still didn't fully understand. It was clear from their faces that they only ever had one thought at a time, and that thinking two things was beyond them'.¹¹⁷

The Vizy household is a miniature replica of self-satisfied, conservative Budapest. Here, one part of the city (the Krisztinaváros district) is where the counter-revolution finds its natural audience. However, the Vizys' image of themselves as Good Hungarians is fragile because it depends on the master/servant relationship, which is riddled with deceit and self-deception.

¹¹⁶ 'Mi is történt azóta? Vasárnaponként fõnn a Bástyasétányon katonabanda zeng s rézlármájára önkéntelenül ütemesen lépdelenek a járókelõk'. Ibid., p. 260.

¹¹⁷ 'Látszott azonban, hogy még most sem értik egészen. Az arcukon pedig az látszott, hogy nekik valóban mindig csak egy gondolat volt, de az is látszott, hogy kettõt már nem tudtak volna gondolni'. Ibid., p. 263.

Conclusion

Az elsodort falu and *An Outlaw's Diary* are apocalyptic works, breviaries of racism¹¹⁸ that share a number of themes. The first is that of national and racial redemption not through the peasantry but deliverance by an urban intelligentsia. Szabó, Tormay, and many other writers regarded themselves as guardians and possessors of independent judgement, owing loyalty to truth alone.¹¹⁹ Their hopes had been disappointed by those poets in Budapest who spent their time 'in the cafés talking philosophy and pacifism',¹²⁰ unlike the staff of *Nyugat* and *Huszadik Század* who would not tolerate Szabó's antisemitic outbursts, or Tormay's heroes Anatole France and Gabriele d'Annunzio. Forging paths for themselves away from their liberal contemporaries, Szabó and Tormay reclaimed the authority of the national poet away from the cosmopolitan types they despised, and marketed themselves as lonely poets of the millennial race war. *Pesti Hírlap* apparently refused to publish Tormay in December 1918, so she reads the rejected article to her beloved Mother:

Let them come, I beseech them, let the poets come who still feel Hungary's pain as their own, for whom Hungary's death is the death of themselves [...] Who can give us a word of comfort, who can strengthen us with faith in a better future, in this hour of our agony, if not the poets of the nation?

And while I clamour in vain for them the immortals rise from their tombs, the great army of national spirits, planting a standard round which the millions of Hungarians should rally; a torch to guide them, a camp-fire to rest them, and the soft flames of the hearth to comfort them in the night of great deception.¹²¹

As Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu argues, the interwar preoccupation with the peasantry reflected intellectuals' need to extol their own value systems and beliefs about

¹¹⁸ George Mosse described Edouard Drumont's *La France juive* (1886) as a breviary of racism in *Nationalism and Sexuality*, p. 150.

¹¹⁹ This is Julien Benda's definition of the intellectual put forward in *La Trahison des clercs*, 1927.

¹²⁰ Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. I, p. 202.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

society.¹²² Nationalist narratives not only provide the individual with a link to the mythical collective, they also assert the existence of a collectivist morality which demands certain correct action, consciousness and thought from the inherently good national subject, upon whose behaviour depends the health of the national collective. And reciprocally, it is only the nation that can provide physical and mental well-being for the individual. In other words, respectability and loyalty are compulsory. Yet a hierarchy of national subjects is also necessary: while a foreigner is incapable of mending his ways, one of 'us' is, in theory, perfectible. One who performs one's national duty through writing is, then, setting the standard for all others.

The urgency with which Szabó and Tormay pressed their claims was heightened by their belief in a race war between Christian Hungarians and Jews. Here, a possible element of awe comes into play. If one attributes special powers to Jews (Szabó/Miklós envy the Jews' alleged creative powers while Tormay was incapacitated by their destructive powers), then the struggle becomes one for life or death. Jews and Christian Hungarians here appear to be engaged in a millennial contest. But the Jews, who have no nation and thus deny others theirs, have simply been around too long:

Are the Jews going to outlive us too, because they will not die for the land? All my national instincts rebelled. They shall not outlive us! Their time will come. They are only mortal, for they want a country – they want our country. The life of peoples is like the life of individuals. They have their childhood, their youth, their manhood and their old age. Humanity has deprived the Jewish people of the flowering time of youth and manhood. Their race has aged unsatisfied while it has buried its contemporaries – Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians. It has seen Athens, Rome, and Byzantium die, though [their race] was old when it stood at their cradles. Without contemporaries, a stranger, it has remained among us, for it must await its destiny. And now, even when the nations had begun to deal kindly with it, it celebrates its wasted flowering-time in a horrible dance of death.

The Wandering Jew paints his face young, and indulges in orgies on the edge of the grave.¹²³

¹²² See Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, 'La strategie de la revue "Viata romanesca" (1906-1916) in Alexander Zub (ed.), *Culture and Society: structures, inferences, analyses in modern Romanian history*, trans. Rita Ionescu et. al., Iasi, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1985.

¹²³ Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary*, Vol. I, p. 235.

Szabó does not go quite so far in predicting and recommending the Jews' demise. His is intended to be a far more spiritual call for inner revolution in order to reconquer national time and space. And although the attention paid to mayhem and decay in *Az elsodort falu* is not as bleak as Tormay's, both texts allege that the Hungarians were now the victims in the war, they had been tricked and exploited by their enemies, and their suffering was unparalleled. While the Jews' longer presence on earth is acknowledged, they are somehow outside and beyond history, a race condemned to wander the earth for all eternity.

Both works portray the city as a centre without which Magyardom cannot survive. It is not the creation of the Jews (though it may be their temporary home), not irredeemably un-Hungarian, and it retains the potential to serve as the jewel in Greater Hungary's crown. It is mistaken, therefore, to interpret Szabó and Tormay as anti-urbanists, writers who simply hated the city and all it stood for. They had depended on it; they rejected it when it suited them, but it was inconceivable that the city itself should be destroyed. Rather, the magyarisation of Budapest was the solution, the restoration of proper relations between races, men and women, adults and children.¹²⁴ The construction of rural and urban difference was inevitably gendered: Budapest under the Commune was a whore, made impure, yet also violated by Jews (and later Romanians). The countryside, on the other hand, was healthy, honest, sexually hygienic and chaste but also eternally fertile, a source of virility and vigour. Sex is recreational in the city, reproductive in the countryside. However, Tormay feared sensuality, while for Szabó it was something of an obsession. Tormay had a fifteen-year love affair with Francesca Orsay, a Hungarian-Sicilian through whom she met Anatole France, d'Annunzio and other Fascist notables. Her vocal support for the family, purity and respectability did not sit easily with her own sexuality, which may explain some of her preoccupation with chasteness and her projection of all things sensual onto Jews: 'Here biological categories are simultaneously political ones: "impotent", for example, applies to both sexuality and politics. [...] "Jewish" was a sexual word (they dissolve our

¹²⁴ In both works, one consequence of Jewish domination is the 'new' tendency of children to answer back to their parents and tell them what to do. Tormay goes so far as to claim that under the Commune, primary school children were forced to look at explicit scenes and watch pornographic films, so that they could shame their parents with their new knowledge.

bodies), a political word (they dissolve our state through Bolshevism), and an economic word (they liquidate our money; they swim in it; we have nothing)'.¹²⁵ Szabó's scenes of young people having sex outside marriage raised more than a few eyebrows in Hungary, and in his defence he claimed that they were realistic portrayals of lust and the vigour of youth. Sex and gender are subverted by Jews elsewhere. Sarkadi buys Judit's virginity, Miklós in his madness can think of nothing but beautiful Jewesses, coffee-house Jews spout feminist nonsense in order to get impressionable women into bed, and such women even refer to themselves as *ember* in the city.¹²⁶ But none of this detracts from the centrality of Budapest, even in its imperfect and impure form, to the fevered national fantasies of race wars and millennial struggles. In their successful attempts to deny the city's long plural history, Szabó and Tormay did not and could not banish Budapest along with the Jews from the Hungarian landscape; instead, they located it at the centre of the true, Hungarian (counter-) revolution.

Édes Anna, on the other hand, turns the self-image of the 'Good Hungarian' on its head. Once again, Budapest is the centre of political life. But in a bid to compensate themselves for sufferings endured under the Commune, the Christian middle class retreats from reality and rationality, instead seducing itself with the image of a perfect, and subservient, female. The saviour, Anna, is a clean country girl, unlike the prostitute whose peasant dress sells sexualised nostalgia. She is required to restore one's faith in domestic staff and replace their dead daughter, in a word, she holds their world together. She makes sense. The Budapest of Kosztolányi's novel is similarly contradictory. Waves of revolution wash over the city, instigated by amateurs and dreamers of all political persuasions, while the general populace adapt and reproduce the sense of order in their own lives (the Vizys wear specially-purchased ragged clothes during the Commune, pedestrians in the Castle district walk in time with the military brass band's rhythmic blare. The tempo of life is fixed by events in the public sphere, and imitated in private. When public life is saturated with nonsense and rhetoric, however, only a few

¹²⁵ Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1997, p. 84.

¹²⁶ Not quite the neutral English 'person', *ember*, which can mean Man, is male. A woman of loose morals was referred to as *das Mensch* in German at the time.

sentient beings (Kosztolányi, and Anna's defendant at the trial, Moviszter) will make the effort to preserve the purity of their private realm without recourse to mindless repetition and internalisation of the dominant ideologies currently in vogue and reigning over the city.

Conclusory Note

Following the collapse of the Dual Monarchy and the signing of the Trianon peace treaty, Budapest became rather anomalous in the new, much smaller and more homogenous state.¹ Habsburg Budapest was significantly different from Hungarian Budapest: largely tolerant, it encouraged and rewarded both parties in the Hungarian-Jewish *Interessengemeinschaft*. Its intellectual novelties went hand in hand with hungarianisation of the city's inhabitants. By the 1920s, Hungarian Budapest, on the other hand, seemed a contradiction in terms: once the capital operated in the national language, the country's majority should also be the city's majority.

Irrespective of whether literary works embraced or condemned the city's heterogeneity, all the novels discussed in this thesis engaged with the polemic that Budapest was somehow alien, or Other to Hungary. This polemic was not, I believe, symptomatic of a small country's rural/urban divide. All attempts to judge the city as non-national, anti-national, or international, were based on the assumption that the capital is in theory, and should be, an integral part of the nation. I have argued that throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the urge to impose an all-encompassing qualitative judgement on Budapest proved irresistible. Despite their best efforts, however, Hungarian novelists were unable to embrace or condemn their capital unreservedly. This was not for want of trying; rather, the more chaotic, diverse and paradoxical the city, the greater the temptation to simplify it. One of the myths of western European literary criticism is that the modern city spawns modernist art: the 'city has become metaphor rather than place. Indeed, for many writers the city has come to seem the very analogue of form'.² In Hungarian literature, however, this does not seem to have been the case. In central and eastern Europe, where the majority of the population lived in much smaller communities, the 'national' status of larger towns was regularly subjected to scrutiny.

¹ The last census of Austria-Hungary, conducted in 1910, identified 54.5% of the population of Hungary as Hungarian. This precarious majority status was reached with the participation of Jews who had opted for Hungarian nationality. 'The pressure of domestic and international events that led to Trianon and its consequences destroyed the Hungarian-Jewish alliance and gradually wiped out all the benefits and advantages that it bestowed on Hungarian Jewry [...] The Jewish minority was not needed any more to maintain a numerical superiority'. Thomas Karfunkel, 'The Impact of Trianon on the Jews of Hungary' in Király, Pastor and Sanders (eds), *Essays on World War One: Total War and Peacemaking*, pp. 457-77 (pp. 459-60).

² Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', p. 97.

While Budapest did function as a metaphor for many things (modernity, Western values, capitalism, socialism, revolution, privilege and so forth), the more a literary work tried to define and contain the 'sinful' city, the more it slipped away. Attempts to impose conceptual order on Budapest in literary form appear to be simple, but end up creating an unreal word city.

The association of Budapest with Jews reveals some parallels between antisemitism and fear of the city, which I do not believe is anti-urbanism, but anti-cosmopolitanism, a form of proteophobia.³ Because Budapest did symbolise some form of *primus inter pares* national space, its composition and, by extension, its mentality, were matters of acute anxiety. The fear that the modernity represented by the capital city was alien to the majority of the country was expressed, here, by members of the urban middle classes who exhibited something of a burgher siege mentality. 'After the 1860s, with the collapse of the social rules of the pre-emancipation era, [the] same discursive structures and narrative elements were deployed more or less defensively, if somewhat aimlessly: to beat back a rising social tide, to divert and vaguely redirect the movement of Jewish integration into the fabric of urban life'.⁴

In the process of denying their capital city's protean qualities, Hungarian novelists also defined what it is to be Hungarian. More often than not, 'being Hungarian' was something rather simple: headstrong, instinctual, closely tied to the soil and one's brethren, and these qualities were allegedly denied by the city. However, the construction of an opposition between quantity (Budapest) versus quality (Hungarian) was not peculiar to Hungary. Added to the Hungarian gentry's image of themselves as proud chaps who would not deign to engage in perfidious trade was the conflict between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.⁵ This dichotomy underwent a process of evolution until it too had become a standard component across European vocabularies of modernity, able to bring 'discordant meanings [...] into a unified framework that renders otherwise incomprehensible social

³ See Bauman, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern', and my Introduction.

⁴ Hillel J. Kieval, 'Antisemitism and the City: A Beginner's Guide', p. 15.

⁵ See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, New Brunswick NJ, Transaction, 1996.

conditions meaningful and makes political action within those settings possible'.⁶ Ideally, in the eyes of its critics, 'Hungarian' spatial hegemony over the city would be reflected in the literary hegemony of simplistic, and exclusive notions of what it is to be Hungarian. In none of the novels do the protagonists lose their 'Hungarian-ness', indeed, their sense of being Hungarian may be reinforced by their city experiences. In this sense, Budapest shaped Hungarian consciousness because, and not despite the fact that in the popular imagination, the city demanded mobility, which was anathema to the Hungarian, because the Hungarian has roots in the countryside.⁷

The dominant Budapest narrative of the period studied here, and particularly in the interwar years, was one of conquest (*meghódítás*) of Budapest, to counteract its perceived symbolic and physical occupation (*térfoglalás*) by non-native culture(s). None of the clichés used by authors were unique to Hungary: the Schopenhauerian view of the war between men and women, the association of Jews with materialism, the stylised simplicity of the rural idyll. Nor was the discreet sense of disappointment with the city: Budapest appeared to be too large and too small, too anonymous and too provincial at the same time. The urge to mask and nationalise this quality of being neither one thing nor the other, however, is what might distinguish Hungarian narrative prose of its capital city from its contemporaries in the West. More locally, Budapest's growth outstripped even that of Vienna, and the Soviet experiment of 1919 compounded fears that the capital was out of sync with the nation, to the extent that although the terminology may have changed, a Budapest spirit and a 'popular' spirit remain emotive and are still used to galvanise political action.⁸

⁶ Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 16.

⁷ Simon Schama recalls Isaac Deutscher's response to a question about his Jewish roots: 'I remember someone in a Cambridge common room pestering the self-designated "non-Jewish Jew" and Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher, himself a native of this country, about his roots. "Trees have roots", he shot back scornfully, "Jews have legs".' Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London, Fontana, 1996, p. 29.

⁸ The populist-urbanist divide 'survived the efforts to homogenise the cultural scene in Hungary under Communism, and has continued to divide the intelligentsia in the period of transition to democracy'. Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe*, pp. 359-60. See also Tamás Fricz, *A népi-urbánus vita tegnap és ma*, Budapest, Napvilág, 1997; Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2003; and György Iványi and György Illés, 'Város-vidék', *Élet és irodalom*, 14 October 2005.

Other authors accepted that Budapest was not the *Volk*, or the ‘genteel’ middle class writ large, because it could not be. For them, the city’s uniqueness was located in its diversity and the starkness of its contrasts between rich and poor, public and private.

The search for belonging in the city, and the desire to improve its life and institutions are more characteristic of the prose fiction of Budapest, than pro- or anti-urban divisions.

Hungarian narrative prose fiction showed a city as paradoxical as any other. Budapest liberated and imprisoned, spawned its own mythicisation, and frustrated all attempts at simplification.

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